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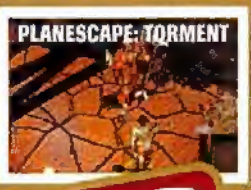

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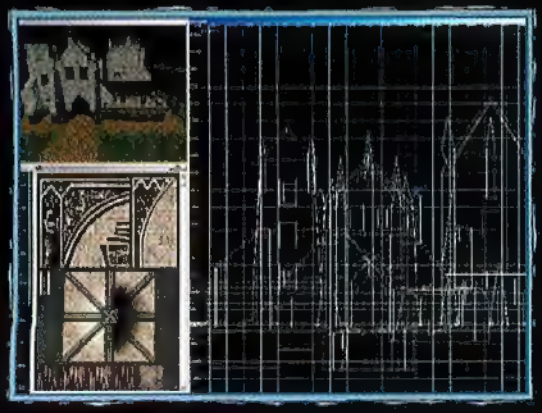

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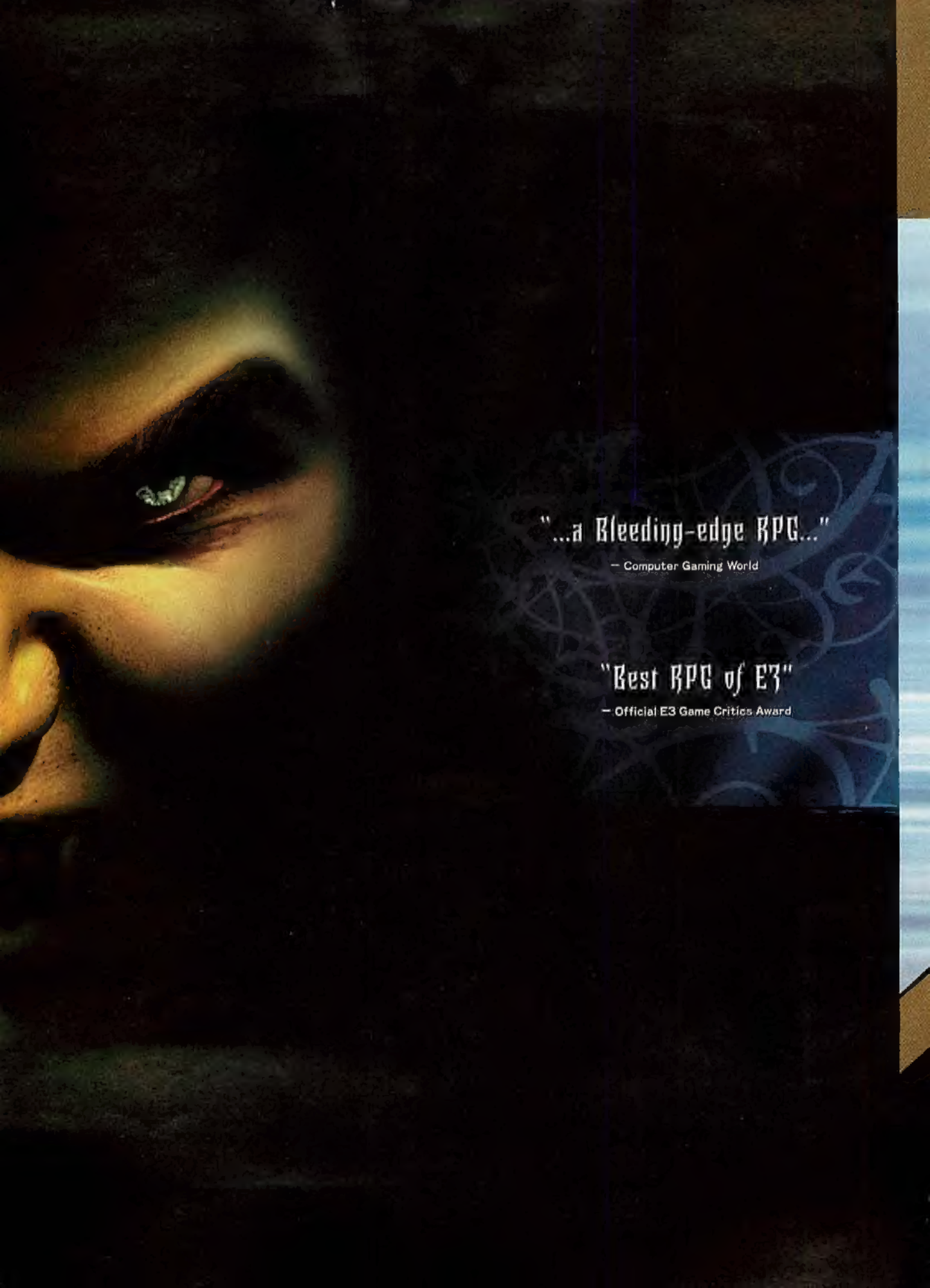
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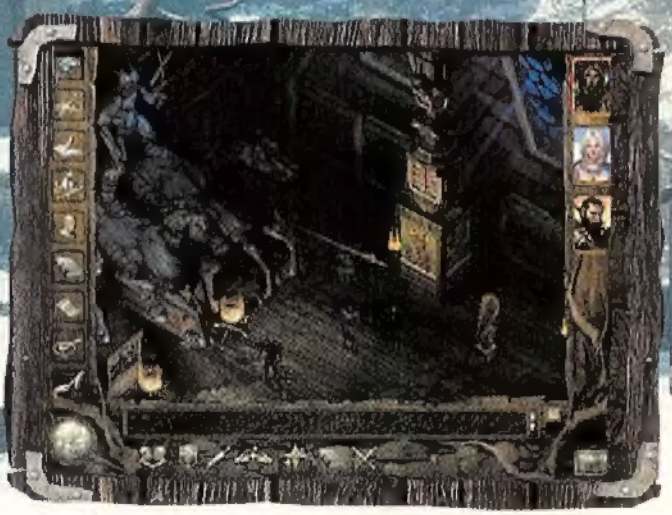

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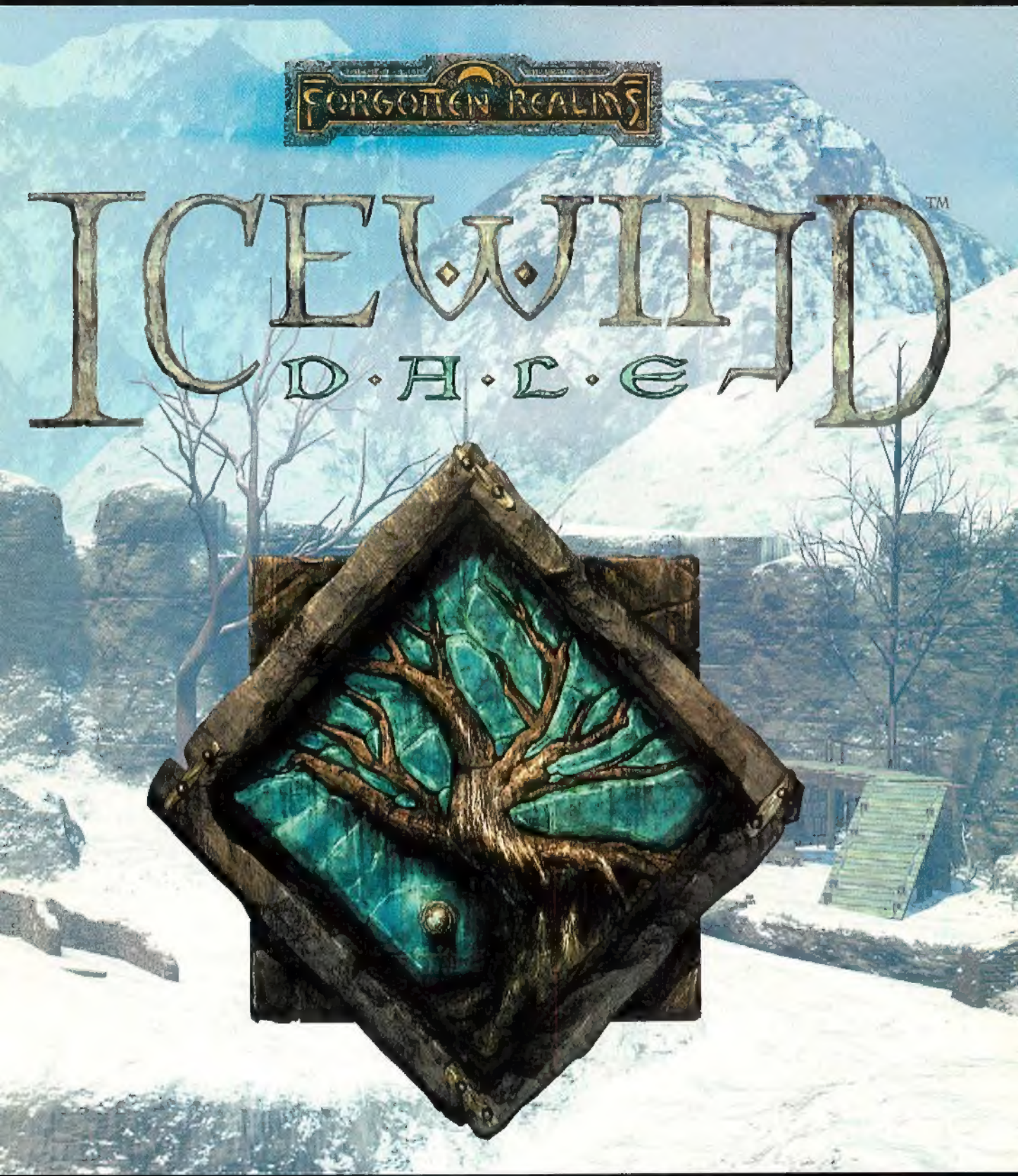

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Sergeant Krung

Served: Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (missing in action).

Sergeant Major Corillon

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Sarapin (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).

Lieutenant Major Antilles

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COVER STORY

Crimson Skies 62

Those magnificent men in their flying machines take to the air and shoot everything in sight in Microsoft's fanciful Swing Era air-combat game. We've got the inside scoop on the prop planes, the movie stars, and the big old zeppelins just begging to be shot down. Oh, the humanity!

FEATURES

The 2000 Premier Awards 69

Through a process more shrouded in secrecy than a Masonic ritual, the cabal of misfits and gentle psychopaths that are the *CGW* editors engaged in their annual orgy of self-important opinions, personal insult, and ritualistic "Amok Time" combat to determine what were the best games of 1999. Scooter may never walk again, but it was worth it. Here they are, the final Premier Awards of the Millennium.

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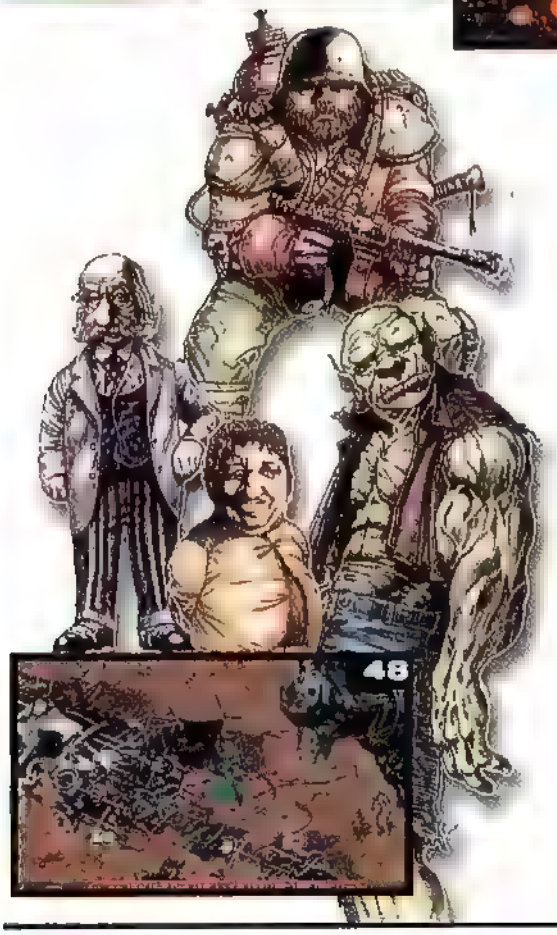
Arcanum 48

We take an exclusive first look at the FALLOUT team's next RPG, an exciting blend of traditional fantasy elements set in a world that's undergone an industrial revolution. Dwarves with guns? Who wouldn't want to play this game?

Deus Ex 52

Forget about conspiracy theories—in Ion Storm's upcoming action/RPG hybrid everything *is* a conspiracy, everyone's out to get you, and the world is teetering on the edge of chaos. Hmmm...sounds like our kind of fun.



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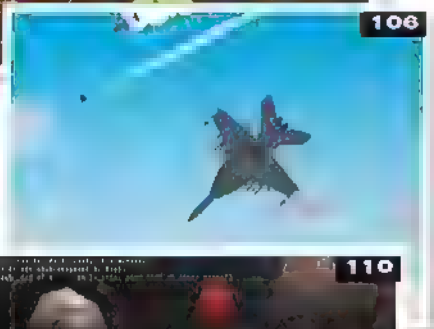

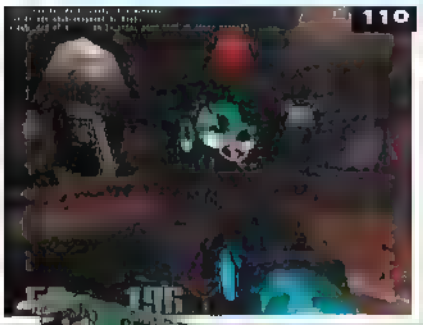

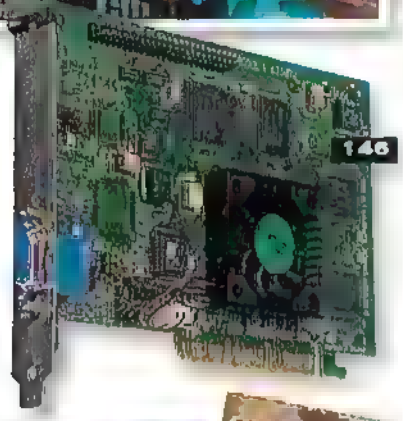

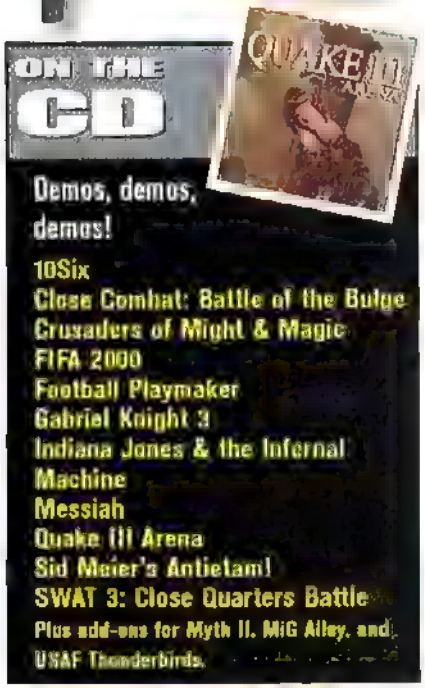

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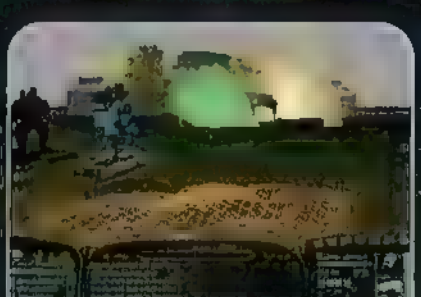

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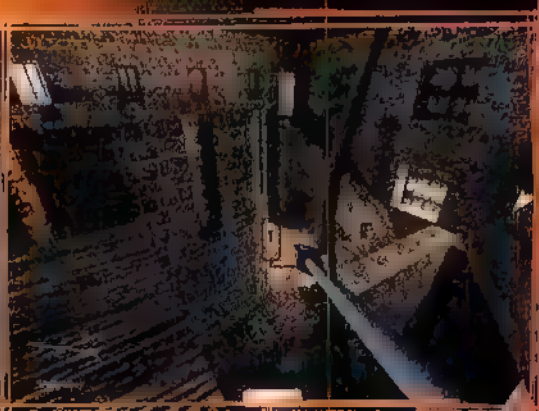

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FOUNDER
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Why It's Worth the Pain

The reason you may have a more difficult than usual time reading my column is because I am writing it on my Palm Pilot. You see, I was struck by inspiration while sitting on a sand dune on a Los Angeles beach.

Luckily, I had a Palm Pilot to pour words into; inspiration never waits for me to catch up to it, that's for sure. Unfortunately, the Palm Pilot still has quite a way to evolve before it will be a truly functional device. An automatic spell-checker would be a good start.)

As a gamer, it is easy to get frustrated and occasionally fed up with PC games along these same lines...because of the technical or human limitations of this rapidly evolving medium. Sloppy interfaces, incompatibility bugs, and features that don't quite do what we expect all conspire to turn our lifelong love into a major pain in the ass.

Often, and this is where gaming can get far more annoying than using a Palm Pilot, we have to overcome hay or technology hurdles just to play. A 20-minute-long installation, followed by restarting your

As a gamer, it is easy to get frustrated and occasionally fed up with PC games...because of the technical or human limitations of this rapdly evolving medium.

system, followed by 3a configuration weirdness doesn't make for much fun. At least on my Palm, I can just turn it on and start writing.

But we keep on playing games, in spite of the hassles, because of the great experiences they provide-experiences that, at their best, are capable of transporting us out of this world in a way that no other medium can. It's with these moments in mind that the *CGW* staff gathered this year, just like each of the last 15, to chose the best games of the year and heap laurels upon them. Given the constant technological changes in PC technology, and the constant drive to innovate, building a game has never been easy. So when those rare games come along-and there are always a few each year-that fully deliver on PC gaming's potential, there's cause to celebrate. It's these games that make it all worthwhile.

Kind of like how being able to write an editorial on a beach is worth some trouble of its own. CGW

George Jones

Two political factions have gone to war over a distant world and the secrets it holds. Victory is the one and only objective. Ground Control challenges players to tactically command an army of customizable squads, tanks, aircraft and several other units.

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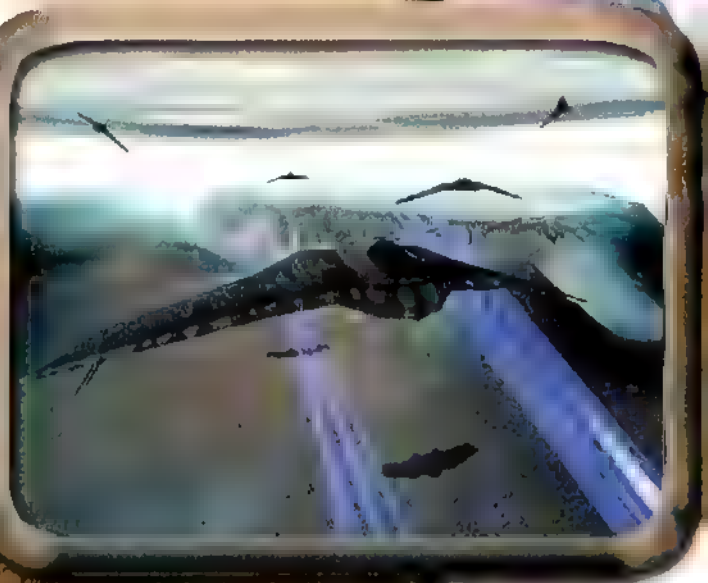
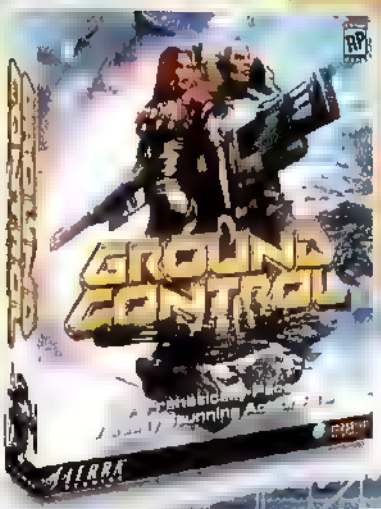


Possession Is The Law

In addition to the incredible single-player campaigns, Ground Control features a radically new online component that offers new challenges through innovative multiplayer modes, including deathmatch style drop-in games–a first for RTS!



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massive

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A Frenetically Paced
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RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
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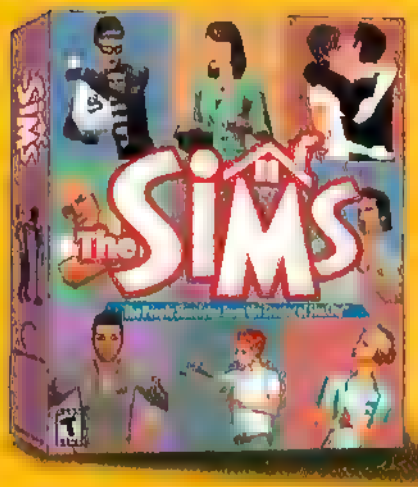
Raise a family...



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Mature Sexual Themes
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pursue a life of crime. Watch them party like swinging singles or make them get married and raise a family. Help your Sims find success — or watch them self-destruct. Whether they end up prosperous or pathetic is up to you. Once you're introduced to The Sims your world will never be the same.

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LETTERS

I have officially gone over the edge. I cannot stop playing the HALF-LIFE mod, COUNTERSTRIKE. I was up last night until 5 a.m. blasting terrorists and counter-terrorists (which is not that bad, except I have done the same thing every night since New Year's Eve).

I thought I was old enough to resist addictive gaming... you know, game until a reasonable hour, sleep, work, eat, then game for a while. Not just game, game, game. I am actually considering going home for lunch just to sneak in a few more rounds. This is terrible. I have not been this addicted in years.

Michael Hawash
Houston, TX

Action games columnist Thierry Nguyen chose COUNTERSTRIKE as the mod of the year (see page 151). Get it at www.counter-strike.net.

A STUPOR IDEA

Come on, Pokemon? Good? Is it common practice at *CGW* to sniff White Out? (Sigh.)

OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR fan who occupies a loft above Pokemon players,
S.R. Krol

LOSING BY SAVING

George Jones' Editorial, "*Losing by Saving*" (#187) has got to be the lamest piece I've read since I had to get online by using text terminals on my Commodore 64. Games themselves are NOT the real world, so of course there are "save game" features. If you could isolate yourself in a chamber, where the telephone never rang, the kids never wanted something to eat, no one ever rang the doorbell, and you had a port-a-potty under the chair, then the "save game" feature might indeed be a detriment. But your suggestions are so far off-base concerning this feature, I can only assume that you really had nothing to write about, so you tossed some words on the grill before the big office party, neglecting to note that the grill wasn't even lit.

David Tracy
Meridian, MS

George Jones responds: *I agree that we need save games. My point was that convenient saves can weaken a game's intensity. I was proposing that we consider new ways of saving in order to maintain the immersion, not get rid of the save game entirely. After all, not everyone has a port-a-potty under their chair.*

THERE ARE PENALTIES FOR THAT KINDA BEHAVIOR

I agree with George Jones' Editorial regarding the save-game feature and the lack of tension that it brings. BALDUR'S GATE had a penalty built-in that discouraged reloading. If you reload a saved game, the creatures on that screen would be tougher and more numerous. The manual didn't really say that it would happen, so I found out the hard way.

After playing it for a while, I found that it was too easy to cheat and reload saved games. My new approach was to play the game from start to finish (in self-multiplayer mode) with six characters without reloading unnecessarily. It made the game much more exciting.

Greg Hand

AS OPPOSED TO FAKE ROLE-PLAYING

Look at the ULTIMA emulators springing up all over the world. Three words, Player-Run Shards. Worlds created for nothing more than the sheer enjoyment of a real role-playing experience. Worlds where there is life, and story, and meaning. Where "kewl doods" and powergamers are scorned and banned. If anyone needs a refresher on what real role-playing is, I can recommend a brush-up course. Stop by Mytharria, Dawn's Rising at dreamweaver.dyndns.com. Here there be role-players!

Paul Mosher

ATHLON VS. PENTIUM III

I've been following your coverage of the new AMD Athlon CPU and how it stacks up against Intel's P-III. I have also been following Gamespot, and I noticed inconsistencies which perhaps you could explain. The latest issue of *CGW* says that Athlon continues to maintain a performance edge over the Pentium-III, and cites the scarcity of compatible motherboards as well as some instability as the only things keeping AMD's powerhouse off the Ultimate Gaming Machine list. Yet ever since Coppermine, Gamespot has maintained that Intel now holds the advantage in all but a handful of synthetic tests. How is this possible? You are both using the exact same benchmarks, and I thought Loyd Case was working for both staffs. What gives?

Jason Rabin

Loyd Case responds: The apparent inconsistency is a result of working on those stories at different times. When we wrote about Athlon in CGW, it was indeed the performance leader, because Intel hadn't shipped Coppermine. And even now, although the Coppermine CPUs are faster (when using RDRAM), finding CPUs and RDRAM is a challenge about as tough as playing UNREAL TOURNAMENT without a mouse.

For our latest component recommendations, check out Killer Rigs on page 154. For the latest updates, see Gamespot's component lists in the Gamer's Guide to Hardware at www.gamespot.com.

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-Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine

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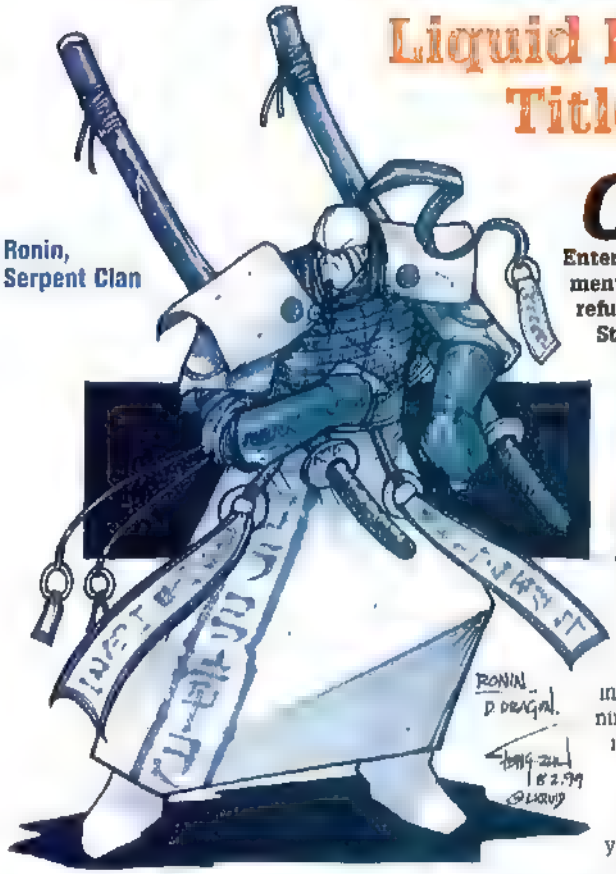
Read.Me

Kung Fu Fighting in BATTLE REALMS

Liquid Entertainment's First Title Is Asian-Styled RTS



Ronin, Serpent Clan

Cannoneer, Wolf Clan

***CGW* just got an exclusive look at the first game from Liquid Entertainment—a new development house made up largely of refugees from Westwood Studios.** It's highly intriguing, and if successful could change a lot of the conventions of the real-time strategy genre.

BATTLE REALMS, which will be published by Crave, is a 3D strategy game heavily influenced by Asian cultures. The designers, especially Liquid founder Ed Del Castillo (who produced C&C: RED ALERT while at Westwood) are big fans of Kung-fu movies, and they plan on incorporating some of the genre's more outlandish concepts—like ninjas who vanish in puffs of smoke, gravity-defying monks, and flying guillotines—into the game.

You'll play as Kenji, the exiled prince of the once-glorious Serpent Empire, who has returned to lead his people against the feral Wolf Clan and the sinister, mystical Lotus Clan. Depending on your choices, your Serpent Clan can evolve into the Dragon Clan, which has more advanced units and capabilities.

Some interesting innovations are in store for the units themselves. Instead of producing specific units with different buildings, units will be spawned by your civilization at a rate according to your prosperity. So if your town's economy is healthy, your birthrate will increase and you'll have more peasants. You can assign them to peasant duties, like resource collection, or you can reclassify them by sending them to a building—the keep, for example—to turn them into fighters. Unit abilities can also be upgraded by sending them to more than one training center.

The designers are trying to break from a few other strategy game conventions by overhauling the resource management and combat systems. The "living resource system," as Liquid calls it, will attempt to create a more realistic model for your civilization's interaction with its environment by making the actions of supplying and storing resources more like the real world. Combat will be enhanced by prepared battle plans, both default and user-created.

BATTLE REALMS is still a long way off—2001, at least—but its originality, coupled with some of the coolest art direction we've seen in a while, make this a game we'll be keeping our eye on. Look for a follow-up preview in a future issue of *CGW*. *—Tom Price*

Druidess, Wolf Clan

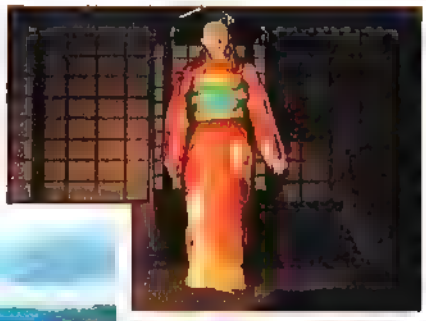
Infested One, Lotus Clan

Shogun Sharpens Its Steel

Epic Strategy Game Set in Feudal Japan Nears Completion

It's not every day a game will let you play as a 16th-Century Japanese warlord. But if you're into strategy or wargames, that's exactly what you might be doing this spring.

The ambitious design of SHOGUN: TOTAL WAR features vast real-time tactical battles, where over a thousand troops maneuver in formations across beautifully rendered terrain. They can be played in either full screen or wide-screen mode—the latter giving the game the proper Kurosawa-feel. Weather effects and atmospherics like smoke from gunfire help paint a realistic scene.



The game can be played on a number of levels: one-scenario real-time battles, strategic campaigns where you build up troops and invade other territories as in *Risk*; or historic campaigns where you attempt to recreate the successes of actual Japanese warlords. The goal of the campaigns is to become the Shogun—the military ruler of all of Japan.

You play the strategic game from a zoomable map overview. Each area produces a fixed amount of koku—rice—the resource that allows you to build fortifications and create units. The more territories you have, the more units you can create—which range from simple ashigaru spearmen to ninja assassins. There are also spies, which let you infiltrate an army to assess its strength or murder a general to demoralize it.

The enemy AI is coming along nicely. It was interesting to see troops retreating to high ground when they got an initial mauling, making it much harder for our cavalry to successfully pursue them. It was also encouraging to see the AI choosing to put spearmen in front to stop a cavalry charge and using archers to soften up infantry from a distance.

Get ready to get medieval later this spring.
–Alan Dykes and Ken Brown

Reality Check

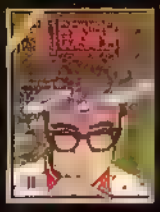
As expected, many publishers waited for the holidays to bring out their big guns, and it shows—there're a lot of Editors' Choices all around, and no universally-panned game. The clearcut winner here is UNREAL TOURNAMENT, with FREESPACE 2 providing a strong presence as well. Here's our roundup of 10 recent games and their corresponding review scores from the major gaming mags and Web sites. All scores use each pub's own scoring system.

	CGW (out of five)	PC Gamer (out of 100%)	CGM (out of five)	PC Accelerator (out of 10)	Gamespot (out of 10)	Gamecenter (out of 10)
Freespace 2	4.5	93%	4.5	8	9.4	7
Half-Life: Opposing Force	3	94%	3.5	*	9.0	8
Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine	3	76%	2	*	6.3	5
NBA Live 2000	5	90%	4	9	8.1	9
Nocturne	1.5	56%	2	8	7.0	6
Sid Meier's Antietam!	4.5	75%	4	*	8.5	*
Sim Theme Park	4.5	73%	4	*	8.0	*
Ultima IX: Ascension	2.5	80%	3	*	6.3	6
Unreal Tournament	5	90%	5	*	9.4	10
Wheel Of Time	3.5	90%	*	9	8.7	7

*** Indicates game has not been rated ● red = editor's choice game**

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in CGW

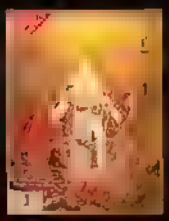
15



March 1985

In addition to being a special designer issue (with articles by Dan Bunten, Bruce Webster, and Jon Freeman), we had a feature article on the viability of gaming on the IBM PC. As of 1985, we had covered only the "most popular personal/home computers: the Apple, Atari, and Commodore 64," and stated that "As long as the significant IBM titles are relatively few in number...we do not feel the need to add a fourth machine to our coverage." Ah, vision...

10



March 1990

Johnny Wilson's editorial this month was a call for more recognition of game designers. It was a rousing editorial that called for publishers, gamers, and press to acknowledge the men and women designing our games. A fine idea. Alas, 10 years later, most designers still go largely unrecognized (with a few glammy exceptions, of course). Have you written an email to the designers of your favorite games lately? If you haven't, maybe you should.

5

March 1995

CD-ROMs were still big news in 1995, and people were still sadly trying to make the gaming/movie horror that is "Silliwood." No one can complain about reviewing TEMUJIN or NOCTURNE when games like VOYEUR or HELL graced our pages this issue. Not all is bad though; we had the preview of the original COMMAND & CONQUER (with the tagline "the strategy equal of WING COMMANDER 3?") and a review of the five-star HERETIC. Finally, we had our annual preview feature touting games such as MECHWARRIOR II, HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC, FLIGHT UNLIMITED, and FULL THROTTLE.

The End of Lag?

Valve and Cisco Team Up to Revolutionize Internet Gaming

If your email arrives 500 milliseconds late, do you care? No. If you lose a couple of frames playing UNREAL TOURNAMENT or TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC online, do you care? Well, considering that some 12-year-old creep in Poughkeepsie called BLUD_DRINKER probably killed you as a result, not only do you care, but you're also very, very angry. The fact is, the Internet wasn't designed as a gaming platform: It was designed as a way for NASA, university researchers, and evil geniuses around the globe to exchange simple, text-based information. Framerate-dependent shooters and real-time strategy games have pretty much moved on from ASCII graphics, and your phone line is simply choking on the huge amount of information it's being asked to fire back and forth between you and that annoying pre-adolescent.

But now, God willing, that's all going to change.

What Valve's HALF-LIFE did for the shooter, so does Valve hope that their PowerPlay project—started in conjunction with Cisco—will do for online gaming. Their goal is simple: to bring LAN-quality gaming performance to the online arena, so that the Internet becomes the dominant entertainment platform of the near future. That's so in Valve co-founder Gabe Newell's words, "TEAM FORTRESS 2 can compete with a rerun of *Friends*."

You Down With UDP?

So what the heck is PowerPlay, and how is it going to revolutionize online gaming? It's a set of protocols and deployment standards, involving such popular cocktail-party topics as UDP header compression and basic infrastructure—including router and access concentrator issues—that should create LAN-type performance for dial-up users, as well as for those gamers languishing away on overcrowded cable modem and DSL subnets. PowerPlay is more than just some sort of elaborate TCP/IP patch; it's a suite of technological improvements that will impact the whole experience of Internet gaming.

Think of it in terms of the sound you hear in a movie theatre. The sharp Dolby audio is an encoding standard that ensures high-quality sound recording, while the THX that brings the sound to life is a deployment standard that ensures that the quality recording is played back in the best possible way. The analogy here with PowerPlay is that it does the same sort of thing—efficiently encoding data and maximizing its performance and play back. There's also one other way to look at it: It should be unbelievably fast. And it will be demonstrably fast, shipping with a simple benchmarking tool so that gamers can compare online game performance between a game's PowerPlay and non-PowerPlay-enhanced versions.

A comparison to OpenGL is also appropriate since Valve, working closely with Cisco—the 800-pound gorilla of the Internet router business—won't be charging any licensing fees or turning a profit on the technology. The initial PowerPlay release schedule is planned in two separate phases for this year. Currently, Cisco and Valve are focusing on industry initiative; asking ISPs to check it and support it; putting the infrastructure in place; making it available to application developers; and reaching out to the online community and convincing them to support PowerPlay-certified networks.

To that end, PowerPlay 1.0 will make its big debut in conjunction with a major—but as yet unnamed—national

Power players

So, will your favorite game embrace PowerPlay? Probably. As of press time, the following developers had already signed on to the project:

- Epic (UNREAL, UNREAL TOURNAMENT)
- BioWare (MDK 2, BALDUR'S GATE, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS)
- Looking Glass (SYSTEM SHOCK 2, THIEF 2, FLIGHT UNLIMITED)
- Outrage Entertainment (DESCENT 3)
- Red Storm Entertainment (RAINBOW SIX, ROGUE SPEAR)
- Volition (FREESPACE 2)
- Ritual (HEAVY METAL F.A.K.K.2, SIN)
- Shiny Entertainment (MESSIAH, SACRIFICE, R/C STUN COPTER)
- Relic Entertainment (HOMEWORLD)
- Ensemble Studios (AGE OF EMPIRES I & II)
- Captivation Digital Laboratories (QUAKE: DA BOMB mod, LOSE YOUR MARBLES)
- Gearbox Software (HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE)

The GOOD...

BLACK ISLE STUDIOS

With the Role-Playing Game Of The Year award going to PLANESCAPE: TORMENT in this issue, that makes it a phenomenal three-in-a-row for Interplay's RPG group, with BALDUR'S GATE and FALLOUT winning in the previous two years. And there's no sign of them slowing down, either, with BALDUR'S GATE II, NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, and ICEWIND DALE all scheduled for release this year. This is a group on an amazing roll (with Bioware's help), producing games that are both popular *and* intelligent. They should be extremely proud.

the BAD...

RPG ANXIETY

Although Black Isle's success makes us very happy, it also, in a way, bums us out. Why? Because—after bemoaning the death of the genre two years ago—there are now so many good RPGs about to come out, we can't fathom how we'll have time to play them all. Along with all the Black Isle titles, we're also anxiously awaiting DEUS EX, ARCANUM, MIGHT AND MAGIC VIII, POOL OF RADIANCE 2...and DIABLO II, all due for release this year. First there were no RPGs to play, now there's way too many. Life is hard.

and the UGLY...

TIM SCHAFER LEAVES LUCASARTS

The creative brain drain at LucasArts continues with the loss of one of its biggest guns, Tim Schafer, the genius behind the adventure game classics GRIM FANDANGO, FULL THROTTLE, and DAY OF THE TENTACLE, has resigned after 10 years with the company. It's further bad news for LucasArts, who've seen tons of talent depart for startups like Nihilistic and Infinite Machine, and it's *really* bad news for fans of LucasArts adventure games. Good luck, Tim...and please start your own startup soon. Gaming needs you.

ISP, offering both a free month of service and a free, non-HALF-LIFE-dependent version of TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC. That should happen by March.

Newell expects other game companies to jump onboard later this year with 2.0, since it will be focused on even lower client latency, bandwidth reservation, and voice integration.

At that point, the modular nature of the technology will allow developers to patch existing games easily, making them PowerPlay-compliant within weeks. By releasing the code specifications to all participants at that point, Valve expects to focus on developing its own games and letting a growing PowerPlay project take care of itself.

Seeing Is Believing

Granted, it was just a "Before and After PowerPlay" MPEG of TFC, but the demonstration we saw was impressive. The weird skipping, dancing movement of characters in the game-world was replaced with seamless animation, and aiming a weapon was a revelation—you could actually aim at an enemy with a sniper rifle instead of guessing where he'd be in 1.3 seconds. Every type of game would benefit, from shooters to the new breed of 3D real-time strat games to the overcrowded realms of massively-multiplayer RPGs to finally allowing sports gamers to play—and not just manage games online.

Count on *CGW* to keep you up to the minute on this potentially momentous technology in future issues.

Robert Coffey

Flip This 'Bird

Ever watch the Thunderbirds or Blue Angels doing their incredible maneuvers and wonder, slack-jawed, "How the '&%# do they do that?" Well, find out. A free add-on patch to USAF lets you wrap your F-16 in a Thunderbird skin and learn three aerial maneuvers from a real Thunderbird pilot. The 9MB download includes instructional voice-overs and an airshow audience to perform for. For extra fun, try equipping your Bird with a few air-to-ground missiles and see if you can hit the grandstand.

You can find the patch at **www.janes.ea.com**, and while you're there, check out what it's like to take off from and land on a carrier by former F/A-18C pilot Jim "Hornit" Campisi.

PIPELINE

Send updates to: cgwpipeline@zd.com

American McGee's Alice Rogue/EA	Q4 00	Need for Speed: Motor City EA	Q1 00
Allegiance Microsoft	Q2 00	Neverwinter Nights Interplay	Q4 00
Anachronox Ion	Q2 00	New Wastwood	Q1 00
Arcanum Sierra Studios	Q3 00	Oni Bungie	Q1 00
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows Of Amn Interplay	Q3 00	Pool Of Radiance II SSI	Q4 00
Battle Isle IV Blue Byte	Q3 00	Reach for the Stars SSI	Q1 00
Black & White EA	Q2 00	Rising Sun TalonSoft	Q1 00
Blair Witch Project GOH	Q3 00	Risk II Hasbro	Q1 00
Comanche 4 Novalogic	Q2 00	Rock GT Interactive	Q3 00
Comanche/Hokum Empire	Q2 00	Sanity Monolith	Q2 00
Cadnasma: Eagle TalonSoft	Q1 00	Settlers IV Blue Byte	Q4 00
Conquest: Frontier Wars Microsoft	Q2 00	Shadow Watch Red Storm Entertainment	Q1 00
Crimson Skies Microsoft	Q2 00	Shogun: Total War EA	Q1 00
Dark Reign 2 Activision	Q1 00	Sid Meier's Civilization III Firaxis/MicroProse	Q4 00
Deus Ex Ion Storm	Q2 00	Silent Hunter II SSI	Q1 00
Diablo II Blizzard	Q2 00	SimMars Maxis	Q3 00
Duke Nukem Forever 3D Realms	Q4 00	Simon The Sorcerer 3D Southpeak Interactive	Q2 00
Dungeon Siege Microsoft	Q4 00	Soldier of Fortune Activision	Q1 00
Evil Dead: Ashes 2 Ashes THQ	Q3 00	Sovereign Sony Online	Q4 00
Falcon Pursuit THQ	Q2 00	Starlancer Microsoft	Q1 00
Final Fantasy VIII Square/EA	Q1 00	Star Trek Armada Activision	Q1 00
Force Commander LucasArts	Q1 00	Star Trek Deep Space 9: The Fallen Simon & Schuster	Q2 00
Freelancer Microsoft	Q4 00	Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force Activision	Q2 00
Giants: Citizen Kabuto Interplay	Q1 00	Summoner THQ	Q3 00
Good & Evil GT Interactive	Q3 00	Tachyon: The Fringe Novalogic	Q1 00
Ground Control Sierra Studios	Q1 00	Team Fortress 2 Sierra Studios	Q2 00
Halo Bungie	Q4 00	The Longest Journey FunCom	Q2 00
Harpoon 4 SSI	Q2 00	The Real Neverending Story Discreet Monsters	Q2 00
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2 Ubi	Q2 00	The Sims Maxis	Q1 00
Hidden & Dangerous: Devil's Bridge TalonSoft	Q1 00	Thief 2: The Metal Age Eidos	Q2 00
High Heat 2001 3DO	Q2 00	Throne Of Darkness Sierra Studios	Q3 00
Icewind Dale Interplay	Q2 00	Tribes 2 Sierra Studios	Q2 00
KISS: Psycho Circus 3DO	Q2 00	Tzar: Burden Of The Crown TalonSoft	Q1 00
Laser Cannon Microsoft	Q2 00	Vampire: The Masquerade Activision	Q1 00
Might and Magic: Day Of The Destroyer 3DO	Q3 00	WarCraft III Blizzard	Q4 00
Motocross Madness 2 Microsoft	Q1 00	Warlords: Battlecry SSI/TSU	Q1 00

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Screen shot courtesy of Blizzard Entertainment®.

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CGW PROFILE

The madman behind UNREAL TOURNAMENT spills his guts

Cliff Bleszinski

How do your relatives react to you making a living designing games?
It's like working in the pornography business. Your parents don't really understand what you do, but they strive to accept it. You may make good money, but your relatives remain unsure of your career choice and try to discourage the youngsters from growing up to be like you.

UT's getting a great reception. Anything about it you wish you'd done differently?
I wish we had more time to include more Assault maps. Oh, and a Nali player model. We're adding that into post-release. There's nothing in the world like firing a rocket up a Nali ass while hearing him scream "Ha Boo GEE!"

What's the relationship between id and Epic like?
We frequently mail-bomb them and hire Dallas-area hooligans to key their cars and pour sugar in their gas tanks.

Who would win? Q3's bots or UT's?
I'd have to say QUAKE3's bots because of their perfect aim!

Will *CGW* readers get farther by getting A's in geography or by boning up on UnrealEd?
Seeing as I'm having a hell of a time finding any talent to hire for our upcoming game I'd have to say the best strategy is to learn UnrealEd, PhotoShop, and 3DStudio Max and pimp your work online while waiting to drop out of college.

What's with that wimpy Dessloch bot in UT? He's modeled after *CGW*'s fairy-tale columnist—er, I mean RPG columnist—Desslock, isn't he?
We were considering having Dessloch's original bio be "Fresh from BALDUR'S GATE, Dessloch is wet behind the ears when it comes to First Person Shooters" but we figured it would be a bit too obvious.

I'll just toss this pearl at ya—banana peel gun! What do you think?
Seeing people slip and slide around an arena into lava like idiots would be highly amusing. I'll be faxing over an NDA immediately so you can help work on our next title.

Cool! How about a seltzer-bottle weapon?
Now that one sucks. Don't quit your day job.

Killcreek will be appearing in *Playboy* soon. Is this an ongoing developer trend?
I don't anticipate *Playgirl* calling me unless Heroin Chic becomes the look they're looking for.

You've been known to wear some, uh, interesting outfits and accessories to previous gaming events. From Marilyn Manson type contacts lenses to pants with blinking lights, we think we've seen it all. How can you top that?
I'm thinking about streaking the Nintendo booth this year at E3.

—Interview by Mark Asher

Subtitles: The CGW Challenge

Shakespeare did it. Movies (especially sequels) do it all the time. And nowadays, game companies seem utterly compelled to do it. What are we talking about? Subtitles, those undifferentiatable nuggets of prose tacked onto game titles in an effort to clear up just what the hell a game named OMIKRON could possibly be about. Even while these marketing-department-spawned stabs at profundity generally fail as abysmally as *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, there seems to be no end in sight. See if you can match up the games on the left with their grandeur-bestowing subtitles on the right. Have fun, dude.

1. OMIKRON	A. THE DARK PROJECT
2. TUROK 2	B. MOBILE ARMOR DIVISION
3. MIGHT & MAGIC VI	C. GUARDIANS OF DESTINY
4. SHOGO	D. FULL BURN
5. DOMINION	E. THE CHOSEN
6. ULTIMA VII	F. THE NOMAD SOUL
7. WIZARDRY VI	G. OPERATION DESERT HAMMER
8. LANDS OF LORE	H. ABSENCE MAKES THE HEART GO YONDER
9. DRAKAN	I. FACE THE UNKNOWN
10. SEVEN KINGDOMS II	J. SINS OF THE FATHER
11. WARCRAFT II	K. THE MANDATE OF HEAVEN
12. THIEF	L. STORM OVER GIFT 3
13. BLOOD II	M. THE BLACK GATE
14. JETFIGHTER	N. ORDER OF THE FLAME
15. JEWELS II	O. TIDES OF DARKNESS
16. GULF WAR	P. SEEDS OF EVIL
17. REAH	Q. THE ULTIMATE CHALLENGE
18. MYTH	R. THE FRYHTAN WARS
19. GABRIEL KNIGHT	S. THE FALLEN LORDS
20. KING'S QUEST V	T. BANE OF THE COSMIC FORGE

ANSWERS:
1-F, 2-P, 3-K, 4-B, 5-L, 6-M, 7-T, 8-C, 9-N, 10-R, 11-O, 12-A, 13-E, 14-D, 15-Q, 16-G, 17-I, 18-S, 19-J, 20-H

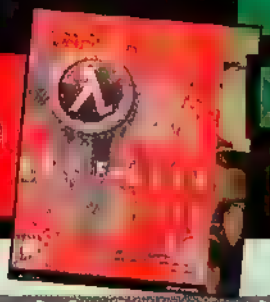
Tchotchke of the Month

Tchotch-ke (choch'ke). Slang, from Yiddish: a cheap, showy trinket.

This fancy, silver clock and picture frame from Activision is quite the *tchotchke*. It's so nice, in fact, that Jeff Green actually considered giving it to his mother for a present—if only he could have figured out a way to scratch off the Activision logo on the front. Jeff's decided to keep it for himself, and gives thanks that Activision sent it to him before they read his scathing review of INTERSTATE '82 last month. Ha ha!

CGW's Monthly Readers' Poll

Top 40



1 Half-Life Havas Interactive 5 stars

The new action kings QUAKE III and UNREAL TOURNAMENT shot onto the Top 40 this month, with the challenger handily beating ARENA by three places. The former champion, QUAKE II, got kicked down to #14. ULTIMA ONLINE also makes an appearance for the first time in a CGW poll. Looks like after a year the game is finally enjoyable, but it's still way behind EVERQUEST in votes. HOMEWORLD doesn't appear this month because of the, uh, Y2K bug, but we'll fix that for the next poll!

This Month	Last Month	Game/Publisher	CGW Rating
2	3	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4
3	2	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
4	4	**Age of Empires II** Microsoft	5
5	20	**Unreal Tournament** GT Interactive	5
6	5	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
7	9	**Heroes of Might & Magic III** 3DO	4.5
8	8	**Quake III Arena** Activision	3.5
9	14	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
10	9	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5
11	16	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
12	8	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
13	11	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5
14	6	**Quake II** Activision	4.5
15	13	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
16	7	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5
17	16	**Half-Life: Opposing Force** Havas Interactive	3.5
18	25	**Rollercoaster Tycoon** Hasbro Interactive	4
19	22	**Baldur's Gate: Tales of the Sword Coast** Interplay	4
20	12	**Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun** Electronic Arts	4
21	17	**Dungeon Keeper II** Electronic Arts	4.5
22	26	**Need for Speed 4** Electronic Arts	5
23	–	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
24	21	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro	3
25	–	**Worms Armageddon** Hasbro	4
26	27	**Myth 2** Bungie	4.5
27	19	**SimCity 3000** Electronic Arts	4
28	24	**EverQuest** Sony	4
29	–	**Aliens vs. Predator** Fox	3
30	18	**Caesar III** Havas Interactive	4.5
31	37	**Might and Magic VII** 3DO	4.5
32	–	**Heroes III: Armageddon's Blade** 3DO	4.5
33	–	**Jagged Alliance 2** TalonSoft	4.5
34	33	**Battlezone** Activision	5
35	23	**FIFA 2000** Electronic Arts	4.5
36	–	**Total Annihilation: Core Contingency** Cavedog	4.5
37	34	**Gabriel Knight 3** Havas Interactive	n/r
38	39	**NHL 2000** Electronic Arts	3.5
39	–	**Wing Commander Prophecy Gold** Origin/EA	4
40	–	**Ultima Online** Origin/EA	1.5

NEW POLLING PLACE!

Vote in the Top 40 Games poll at www.computergaming.com. The more people vote, the better the results, but please only vote once per month.

Top Action Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Half-Life** Havas Interactive	5
2	–	**Unreal Tournament** Epic/GT	5
NEW	3	2	**Quake III Arena** id/Activision	4.5
4	4	**Thief: The Dark Project** Eidos	4.5
5	3	**Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear** Red Storm	4.5

Top Adventure/RPG Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**Baldur's Gate** Interplay	4.5
2	5	**System Shock 2** Electronic Arts	4.5
3	3	**Fallout 2** Interplay	4
4	4	**Grim Fandango** LucasArts	4.5
5	2	**Final Fantasy VII** Eidos	4.5

Top Simulations Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
NEW	1	–	**Freespace 2** Interplay	4.5
2	1	**MechWarrior 3** Hasbro Interactive	3
3	4	**Wing Commander: Prophecy Gold** Electronic Arts	4
4	5	**Heavy Gear II** Activision	4.5
5	2	**Falcon 4.0** Hasbro Interactive	3.5

Top Sports/Racing Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	2	**Need For Speed: High Stakes** Electronic Arts	5
2	1	**FIFA 2000** EA Sports	4.5
3	4	**NHL 2000** EA Sports	3
NEW	4	–	**NBA Live 2000** EA Sports	5
5	5	**Midtown Madness** Microsoft	4

Top Strategy/War Games

This Month	Last Month	Game / Publisher	CGW Rating
1	1	**StarCraft** Havas Interactive	5
2	2	**Age of Empires II: Age of Kings** Microsoft	5
3	3	**StarCraft: Brood War** Havas Interactive	5
4	4	**Heroes Of Might And Magic III** 3DO	4.5
5	5	**Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri** Firaxis	5

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III. BREAKING THE OATH: TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

1. A verbal warning accompanied by a review of security oath.
2. A stronger warning, sometimes accompanied by browbeating and intimidation.
3. Psychologically working on an individual to bring on depression that will lead to suicide.
4. Elimination of the individual that has been made to appear as an accident, suicide or heart attack

Sources say Deus Ex was created by Ion Storm to uncover the truth. Some say it's merely the latest conspiracy fueled by a madman. And some say it's a future training tool made to look like a hyperrealistic 3-D roleplaying computer game. Whatever it is, proceed with caution. They know you want it.

[SECTOR 1]

The year is [redacted], and the world is a dangerous and chaotic place. Terrorists operate openly, killing thousands. The world's economics are close to collapse and the gap between the insanely wealthy and the desperately poor has grown to the size of the Grand Canyon. Worst of all, an ages old CONSPIRACY bent on world domination has decided that the time is right to emerge from the shadows and take control. No one believes they exist. The conspirators must be stopped from spreading -GREY DEATH-. *This world is full of lies and betrayal, a world where nothing is as it seems and entire nations can seemingly be turned at the pushed of a button.* *TRUST NO ONE.*

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- Fight terrorists, as ordered by UNATCO, to maintain control over [redacted].
- Survive constant attack and/or incarceration as you establish ties to a new ally base.

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BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Send any and all information to www.unatco.com. It could be the difference between life and death.

- Establish a new base of operations with [redacted] and forge alliances

- Find a way to build your own capabilities to the point where you have a chance of defeating the one with God-like powers.

01937219013-1
1525 6862

Item No. 14428 562

CONSEQUENCES:

Diagram B2 Situational Missions (Fig's 2.1-2.6)

Fig. 2.1 to id your own capabilities

Fig. 2.2 establish base of operations

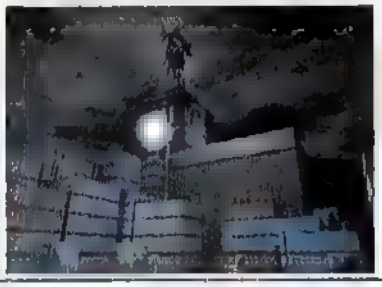

Fig. 2.3 maintain control over Ambrosia

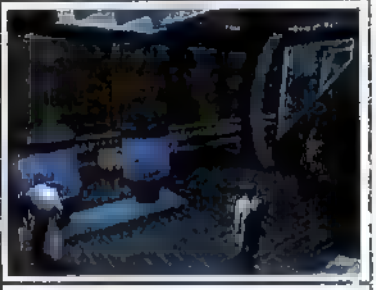

Fig. 2.4 Survive incarceration

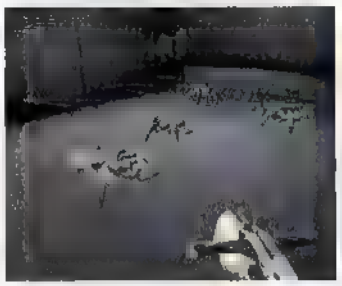

Fig. 2.5 establish tion to ally base

Fig. 2.6 Expand your pool of allies

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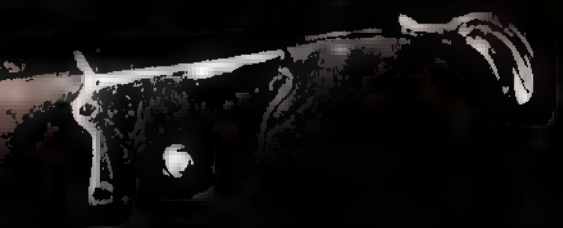

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evoke sheer terror among a few ill-fated network friends. Just remember, this is a place stalked not only by creatures but by change. new world filled with horrors even more unimaginable than in the one before. WWW.DAIKATANA.COM

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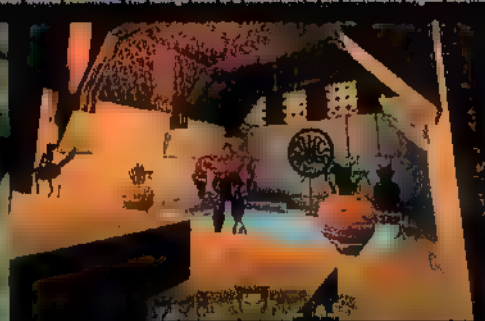

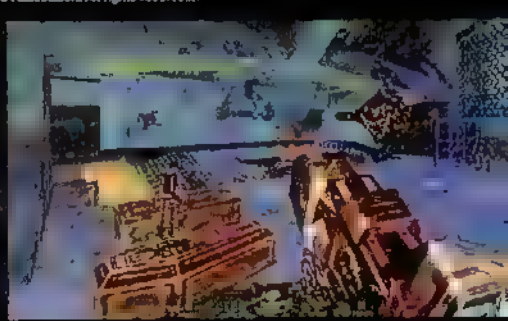

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- Play 1 of 2 main characters - D'arci Stern - an agile, street-savvy female cop or Roper McIntyre - a mysterious ex-soldier.
- Multiple modes of combat. Engage in hand-to-hand fighting, heavy-weaponry face-offs, vehicle chases and building shoot-outs.
- Command a variety of vehicles. Take control of police cars, vans, motor-bikes, hang-gliders, ambulances, trains and helicopters.
- 3D volumetric fog, rain, snow, night and day simulation, wall-hugging shadows and real-time simulation of crashes enhance the atmosphere and action of the game.

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A First Look at the FALLOUT Team's Stunning New RPG World

by Jeff Green

ZEPPELIN ROCKS! All worries that you're playing a generic fantasy RPG will vanish when you see the opening movie's airborne zeppelin.

Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura

Way back in the 20th Century, three humble game designers at Interplay got together and created a masterpiece called FALLOUT. Brimming with creative energy and imagination, the 1997 post-apocalyptic RPG helped reignite the then-smoldering role-playing genre with a killer combination of deep gameplay and bold artistic design. Three years later, the game still looks and plays great.

After completing the initial design on FALLOUT 2 almost two years ago, the three designers packed their things and set out on a quest of their own—to found their own game company. And so it was that Tim Cain, Leonard Boyarsky, and Jason Anderson started up Troika Games. Their first RPG is on its way later this year—and if you thought that FALLOUT was ambitious and cool, wait until you see ARCANUM.

Dwarves With Guns

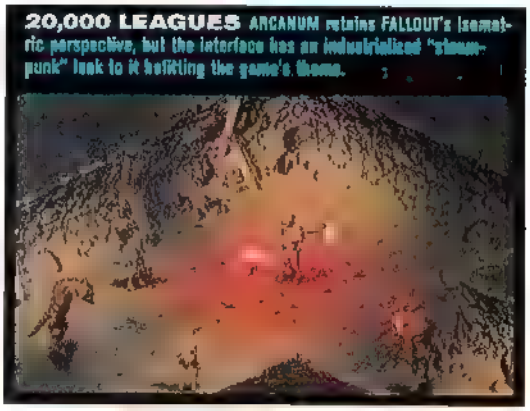
For their first project, Troika's desire was to move away from FALLOUT's futuristic setting and to create a classic fantasy RPG instead. But, just as they did with FALLOUT, they've added a twist: It's a fantasy world that's gone through an industrial revolution. Thus, though you'll still see all of your favorite Tolkienesque characters—gnomes, elves, ogres, halflings, and so on—you'll now have industrial-age weapons and machinery along with your arrows and spells. Now, dragons must share airspace with World War I-style zeppelins.

ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS AND MAGICK OBSCURA (the game's full title) retains FALLOUT's isometric perspective, but the team created a brand-new engine for the game, with 800x600 graphics and 16-bit color. Just as FALLOUT's graphic design mixed a futuristic setting with kitschy 1940s-style art, ARCANUM features an eclectic melding of fantasy elements with a late-1800s, Jules Verne-style industrial look. And this dual imagery—fantasy versus technology, magic versus machinery—forms the core conflict and the essence of ARCANUM's story and gameplay.

ARCANUM: OF STEAMWORKS AND MAGICK OBSCURA
GENRE: Role Playing • **RELEASE:** Q3 00
PUBLISHER Sierra
DEVELOPER: Troika Games

You can play one of eight races—human, dwarf, halfling, elf, half-elf, gnome, half-orc, or half-ogre. Stats are divided into four mental stats (intelligence, willpower, perception, and charisma), and four physical stats (strength, constitution, dexterity, and beauty). Most are standard RPG fare, but beauty is quite cool, determining a person's initial reaction to you before you ever speak. Create a butt-ugly gnome, for example, and people may completely blow you off. (As in FALLOUT, you'll be able to recruit party members along the way.) The system is completely open for you to create any statistical combination—and the game will play out differently depending on your choices.

Similar to FALLOUT's perks, ARCANUM features

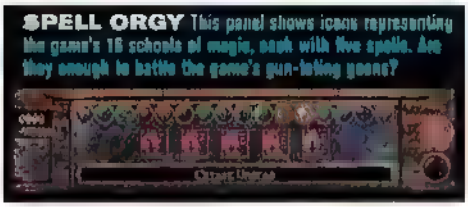


20,000 LEAGUES ARCANUM retains FALLOUT's isometric perspective, but the interface has an industrialized "steampunk" look to it befitting the game's theme.

optional "backgrounds." If your character were "Raised By Snake Handlers," for instance, you would get a 20 percent resistance to poison. You can edit the background text, so the more creative role-players can make up their own backstory. Similarly, you can easily import portraits into the game, allowing you to customize your character's look.

BLUEPRINT FOR DEATH Those who follow a technological path will gain access to schematics such as this, which will let you create all sorts of wondrous – and dangerous – mechanical objects.

THANK YOU GOD This standard RPG inventory screen has one truly exciting feature: an auto-pack button on the right side that automatically sorts your inventory items.



SPELL ORGY This panel shows icons representing the game's 16 schools of magic, each with five spells. Are they enough to battle the game's gun-toting goons?

TALK TALK TALK As in FALLOUT, dialogue is key in ARCANUM. How you behave towards others will go a long way in determining how the game plays out.

Spellcasting Vs. Technology

The heart of the game, and your biggest character decision, is determining where you stand in the great magic-versus-technology dichotomy now enveloping the land. It's been about 70 years since the Industrial Revolution, and the land's magic users now must contend with those pursuing technological disciplines instead. Are you an old-school magic guy, a new-school engineer—or a dabbler in both schools? ARCANUM will monitor your decisions with a balance meter, and how well you succeed in casting a spell—to give one simple example—will be determined by how strong your magical aptitude is. The more you commit to one particular school, the stronger you'll be in that school, but the more vulnerable and ineffective you'll be in the other.

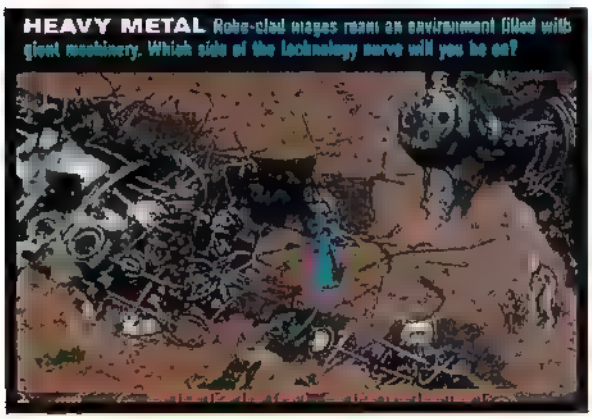
Arcanum's magic and technological systems are extremely deep—providing ample rewards for devotees of either one. Magic is divided into 16 colleges, with five increasingly powerful spells in each. There are eight disciplines of technology, with seven degrees in each. As you earn degrees, you'll gain the ability to read increasingly complex schematic diagrams, which in turn will enable you to use found objects to create powerful technological weaponry, such as folding guns and a giant, mechanized arachnid that can fight for you.

Speaking of fighting, the game will use both a real-time and turn-based combat system—you can play it either way. Both systems are essentially based on speed. In real-time, the faster your character, the quicker you'll be able to strike. In turn-based mode, faster characters will have more action points to spend per turn (*a la* FALLOUT). The designers figure that most players will actually use *both* systems—and you can switch dynamically throughout the game.

ARCANUM's interface is a state-of-the-art marvel that accounts for things RPG fans have been clamoring for for years. Most notable is the "auto-pack" feature, which will automatically rearrange your inventory items to use slots at maximum efficiency. The game's deep logbook will keep track of all quests completed, failed, or still open; your reputation in various towns; any blessings or curses you have; and your total number of kills (as well as *what* you've killed).

Finally, the game will include a completely separate multiplayer mode, with its own set of maps that will let about 2-8 gamers play either cooperatively or competitively over LANs or the Internet. Troika is including an editor in the box, so players will be able to create their own detailed maps and quests to distribute. Expect a huge community to swell up around this game.

ROGUE'S GALLERY Concept sketches of ARCANUM's many character types.



HEAVY METAL Robe-clad mages roam an environment filled with giant machinery. Which side of the technology curve will you be on?

Quest For Glory

With FALLOUT under their belts, the Troika team really had nothing else to prove. But with ARCANUM, they are taking one of computer gaming's oldest genres — the fantasy RPG — and turning it on its head with something completely new. Dwarves with guns? Mages on steam trains? We'll see how well they pull this off later this year. Stay tuned. CGW

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DEUS EX
GENRE: RPG • RELEASE DATE: Q2 00
PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive • DEVELOPER: Ion Storm
CONTACT: www.ionstorm.com

Deus Ex

It Isn't Paranoia if They're Really Out To Get You

by Robert Coffey

It's a cold, cruel world, a world ragged with pain in the wake of a sweeping plague called the Grey Death, a world drowning in a vicious whirlpool of riots and barbaric acts of terrorism. Gliding silent and unseen through the murk are the agents of UNATCO, their shadowy lives a daily maelstrom of deceit, treachery, and violence. As a member of this global anti-terrorist organization, it is your duty to silence the forces of chaos; but slowly the accusations of the supposedly murderous thugs you're battling begin making sense, and your crystal-clear perception of morality is fogged by uncertainty. Who can you trust? Who are the Judases? The true believers? And what is your role in it all?

Welcome to the conspiracy-steeped world of DEUS EX, a world where the only thing you can trust is that you can trust no one.

Secret Agent Man

Overseeing the development of this next-generation RPG is Warren Spector, the designer behind ULTIMA UNDERWORLD and SYSTEM SHOCK. The game's overarching goal in Spector's mind "[is to] put power back into the player's hands. To confront them not with puzzles, but with problems." To that end, every facet of gameplay is being crafted to present the gamer with multiple possibilities and choices, giving the player the ability to shape their playing experience their own way.

This begins with the player character's initial stats. Rated in eleven abilities including computer skills, medicine, lockpicking, demolitions, general tech-ability, and four types of weapons skills, your avatar starts off untrained in all. As you gain experience, you can increase your abilities to Trained, Advanced, and Master skills, but experience points are going to be so stingily won that you'll only be able to master two skills at most, with the rest left primarily at the Untrained level (unless you go the "generalist" route, training a little in all skills).

But while these tough decisions will significantly impact your game, you aren't going to be forced to play just one way. You'll still be able to use a sniper rifle even if you're untrained, you just won't have sufficiently-steady aim to be effective. And while anyone can hack a security system, only the trained won't set off an alarm in mere seconds. Dialogue with NPCs focuses on simple either/or responses, forgoing convoluted conversation trees, yet still playing a part in sculpting the overall course of the game.

Six-Trillion Dollar Man

But the biggest – and easily the coolest – device defining your character is the nanotechnology augmentation you acquire. DEUS EX takes place in a not-too-distant future where high-tech personal enhancements allow you to upgrade your body like so much hardware. When you get the opportunity to install an augmentation, it will typically come in the form of yet another choice. Do you enhance your legs for better speed and jumping ability, or upgrade

your eyes so you can see in the dark? The augmentations will work hand in hand with the other characteristics to create unique, specialized characters: Expect to see sniper players augment their eyes to the point that they can see their foes at great distances, what weapon they're carrying, and even how many hit points each of their body parts has left.

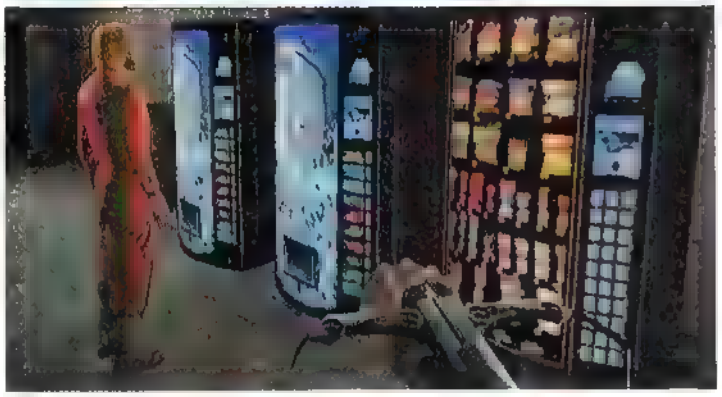
The goal is to create a game that equally rewards different play styles. To that end, experience is rewarded for solving problems, not for killing enemies. It's atypical of most RPGs, but if you're encouraging some players to sneak around, break into installations, and hack computer systems, why would you want to negate their special attributes by forcing them to shoot anything that moves?

But rewarding all those different play styles makes balancing and designing the game that much thornier. Every obstacle needs multiple solutions. For example, an early mission asks you to infiltrate a sealed-off Statue of Liberty in order to neutralize some terrorists. How do you get in? You can kill every terrorist in sight and storm in, take security offline, get a key from an informant, plant demolition charges to blast in, or hide in a security camera's blind spot while you pick a lock. It doesn't matter *how* you get in, just that you do. You could kill every terrorist and kitten in sight, but you're not getting any experience until you get in that statue.

So don't let the first-person, UNREAL engine-driven look of the game fool you into dismissing DEUS EX as another moody shooter. A compelling, twisting storyline and honest-to-God unique character generation make this a game to watch for in 2000. CGW

MILITARY SURPLUS While you won't see any monsters in DEUS EX, there will be plenty of imaginative but plausible military combat robots to deal with.

BOWFINGER Looking to be a stealthy kind of spy? You might want to strap this crossbow to your forearm and "interact" with your enemies.



5 THINGS...

...From the Real World Affecting the Artificial World of DEUS EX

[1] Usable, Interactive Objects
Vending machines will dispense drinks and snacks for restoring minimal amounts of health. Hanging pots and sides of beef in a kitchen will move when brushed up against – perfect for tracking escaping enemies.

[2] Blueprints and Maps
Actual blueprints and maps of the Statue of Liberty, Hong Kong, New York's Battery Park, and more underscore the game's realistic feel.

[3] Localized Damage
Damage will be tracked separately for arms, legs, torso, and head. Head shots will kill quickly, leg shots will slow or cripple, damage to the arm will affect aim.

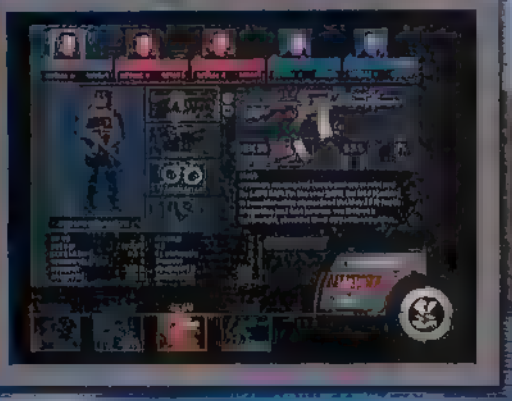
[4] No Monsters
Instead of a constant, tedious stream of human enemies, very plausible, near-future military combat robots will liven up the adversarial mix.

[5] Everyone Can Hear
You can hear security cameras and guards at a distance, as well as the sound of guns drawn by bad guys who've already heard you.

DOCTOR FEELGOOD Among the NPCs you'll meet are nanotechnology surgeons who will cybernetically enhance you...but at what cost?

STAR CHAMBER Much of DEUS EX's action takes place in top-secret facilities like this.

'This game rocks, you



First stop on any mission is the pre-assault briefing. Here you'll receive the latest updates on the current crisis, configure your team's arsenal, and determine your entry point and tactical approach to the target location.

Systematically search each environment, or take command to breach and clear each location until you find your suspect. As the Element Leader, stealth and dynamic tactics are just a keystroke away when commanding your five-man team.

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— Games Domain

9/10
"Jane Jensen is the best story-teller of the interactive medium."
— Gamesmania

blood of the sacred

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3

blood of the damned

series to ever grace a PC"

– Next Generation Online

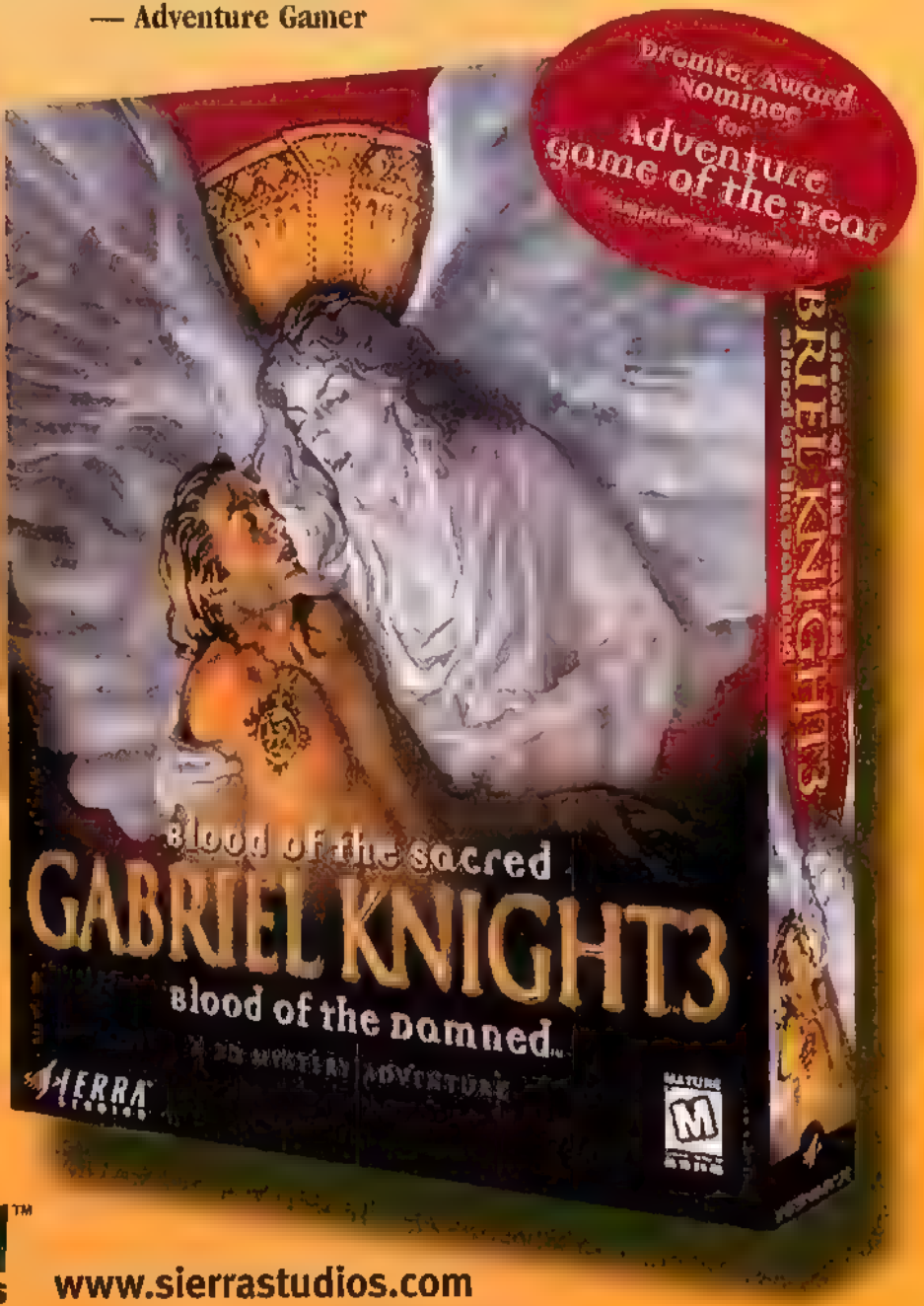
★★★★★

"the most complete, the most ambitious, the most compelling, the most intelligent, and yes,...the finest game the genre has yet produced."

— Adventure Gamer

"Here is everything you want in an adventure game."

— Time Digital



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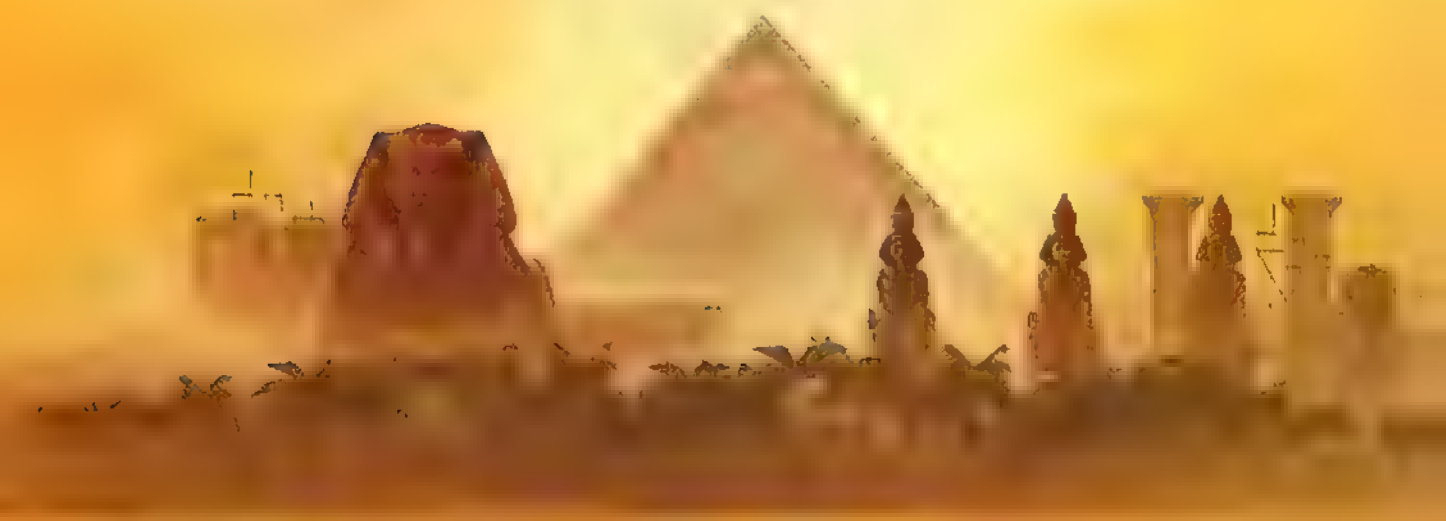

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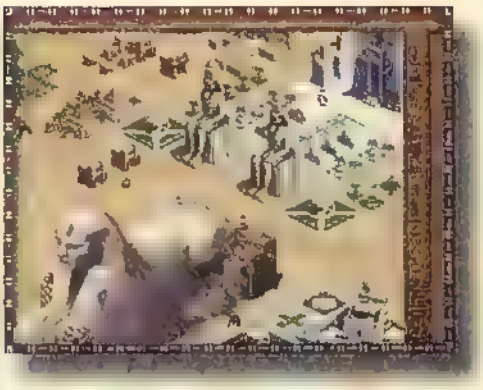
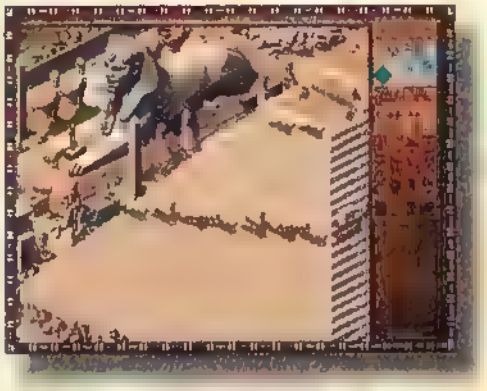
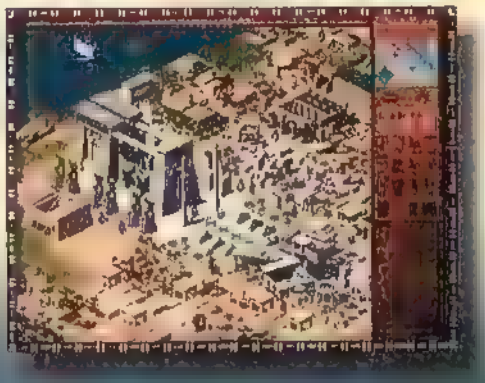






EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY

SWING COMMANDER

GENRE: Action • RELEASE: Summer, 2000
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
CONTACT: www.crimsonskies.com

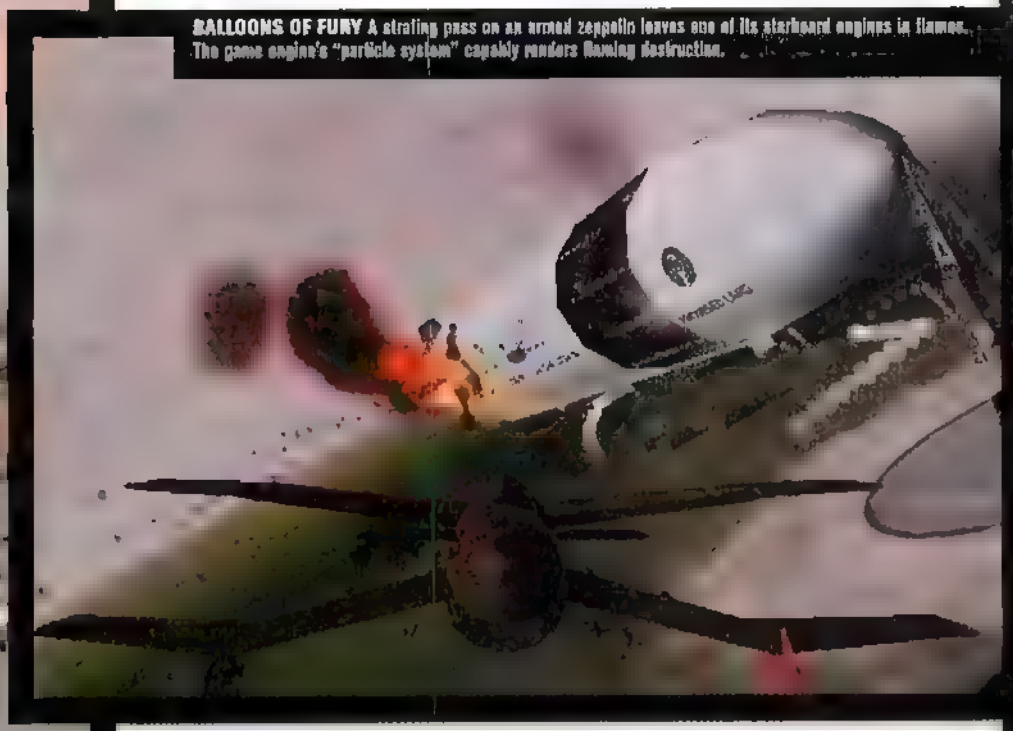
Check Six, Daddy-O! In a 1930s That Could Have Been, You Have To Bank Hard and Fire True, or You're History

by Chris Lombardi

Every once in a great while, a fresh game concept comes along that grabs ahold of a gamer's heart, sinks its nails in, and won't let go. Even before you know who's developing the game, before you know what "engine" it will use, or how many jillion polygons it will push. Before you read the bullet-point list of features, or know which washed-up actor will do the voice-overs in the cut-scenes....you're in love. Your first thought: "This is a game that I *must* play." Your second: "I hope to God the game developers don't screw it up."

Such was my response when I caught wind of Microsoft's upcoming CRIMSON SKIES. All I had to hear before I started pining away with love sickness was this. It's an air-combat game set in a speculative 1930s. It's got slick, tricked-out prop aircraft; aircraft-carrier zeppelins; and a nutty pulp-fiction storyline. And—and this was the clincher for me—a 30s-era Big Band/swing soundtrack.What a relief it was, after visiting Microsoft to uncover the rest of the story, to find that this great concept might actually deliver on its promise.

The universe of CRIMSON SKIES is the brain child of Jordan Weisman and his pals at the FASA Corporation, the tabletop-gaming folks who brought the BATTLETECH and



BALLOONS OF FURY A strafing pass on an armed zeppelin leaves one of its starboard engines in flames. The game engine's "particle system" capably renders flaming destruction.

SHADOWRUN gaming universes to the world. According to Weisman—founder of FASA and now the Creative Director of Microsoft Games—CRIMSON SKIES was a labor of love, a project he and the FASA crew developed in long, after-hours gaming sessions. The game began as a tactical boardgame of air-to-air combat, similar in style and mechanics to the classic CAR WARS boardgame. Players chose an aircraft, outfitted it with weapons, and dueled on hex-grid maps using an elegant set of rules for fire and movement. The boardgame was published in 1998 and has since sold over 10,000 copies—a decent showing in the ailing tabletop-gaming biz.

When FASA was purchased by Microsoft in January of 1999, Weisman saw an opportunity to free the CRIMSON SKIES universe from the limitations of text and cardboard, and make it more fully realized in the multimedia realm. When Microsoft gave the go on the project, Weisman joined his band of designers and artists with veteran flight-simulation developers Zipper Interactive, and the digital incarnation of CRIMSON SKIES began its taxi for take-off.

The Untied State of America

The CRIMSON SKIES universe starts with historical U.S. events of the 1920s and suggests a few fascinating and reasonably plausible "what if?" changes. What if, the CRIMSON SKIES universe asks, the push for Prohibition had become a virulent fight over state versus federal power and had failed—resulting in a weakened union and a heightened spirit of regionalism? What if some states then became "Prohibition states," outlawing alcohol and closing their borders to stop alcohol trafficking, getting into squabbles with neighboring non-Prohibition states? What if the flu epidemic of 1918 had returned in 1927 in a nastier form, and the resulting plague mentality had bolstered the spirit of isolationism? Finally, what if the stock market crash of '29 was right on schedule?

From this point, the history of CRIMSON SKIES takes a sharp left turn from plausibility and spins off, out of control, into the realm of wacky pulp fiction. The union shatters into 20-some independent nations, among them the Nations of Dixie, Hollywood, Appalachia, and Free Colorado. The great public-works projects of the Depression-era are never completed, so that the system of interstate highways that paved the way for the age of the automobile is never realized. The result is a greater reliance upon—and thus a speedier development of—aircraft. Zeppelins and aerobuses become the primary means of interstate trade, and aircraft militia the means of waging wars and combating the air piracy that thrives in the chaos.

In steps the hero of our tale, Nathan Zachary, the leader of a band of aerial pirates with a Robin Hood morality. CRIMSON SKIES will tell the story of Nathan and his colorful adventures in this vivid milieu in classic WING COMMANDER-style: a series of air combat scenarios interspersed with narrative. True to the era, the narrative will be delivered via voice-acted "radio dramas" and news reports, as well as stylish black & white photography.

It's Good To Be (Minions of) the King!

During our visit to the legendary Microsoft campus (where we got lost and narrowly avoided absorption into a Powerpoint project team), we had a chance to talk off-the-cuff with the game's developers about their experience working for the Big M. After the obligatory jokes about corporate mind-control implants – and a comment from Jordan Weisman about how his title "Creative Director at Microsoft" was an oxymoron (he was *kidding*, Bill...) – they had several interesting, and positive, things to say about some of the advantages of working for the up-and-coming gaming giant.

The largest advantage is, of course, resources. This doesn't necessarily mean cash, however. It means, for instance, the luxury of taking the time needed to get a game right. The relatively tiny Games Division, the revenues of which are a pittance in the larger Microsoft scheme, doesn't suffer the same overwhelming pressures to ship games as does a smaller company that lives from release to release. If a game has drifted off track, Microsoft can take the time to fix it. Or – in the extreme case – if a project is just not working out, they can kill it (although a project manager in the group quickly commented that this would be "strongly discouraged").

Perhaps the most impressive example of "resources" was the Microsoft quality-assurance infrastructure, the largest and most sophisticated in the business. Not only do game designers get access to a huge team of professional testers available to hammer away at Microsoft games, but they have an active playtesting program that brings in gamers from the surrounding community to play and comment on works in progress. And they don't just test Microsoft games. If, say, the designer of MECHWARRIOR 4 (another FASA/Microsoft project) is trying to hash out details of the MECH interface, he can have the testers play Sierra's EARTHSIEGE in order to find out what they did and didn't like about its interface! The obvious danger of this approach is the "design-by-focus-group" syndrome, but the developers seemed well aware of that risk.

Finally, they were delighted to find that the halls of Microsoft are teeming with talented people. It was common, they said, to run into a legendary programming god who, for the price of steak fajitas at the Campus food court, might help them hash through a particularly hairy engineering problem.

Sounds just peachy, don't it? Of course, they may not have been joking about those brain-implants.

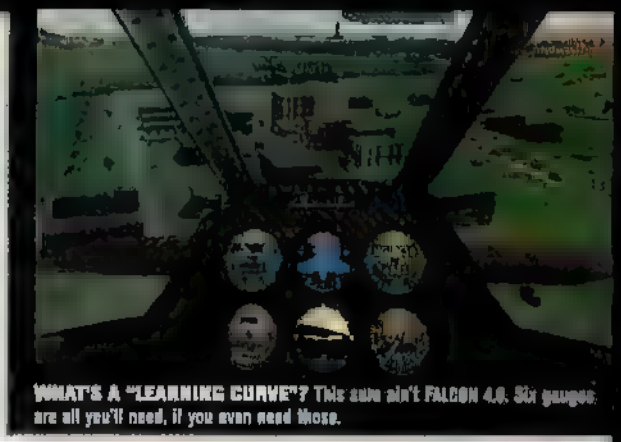
SIMPLE, HOT, DEEP

The CRIMSON SKIES approach to air combat is also similar to WING COMMANDER. While the underlying game engine is capable of delivering a "serious" flight-simulation experience (the engine is a descendant of that used for MicroProse's TOP GUN F-16 sim and MECHWARRIOR 3), the designers are dialing back the realism to the "grip it and rip it" level. While each of the aircraft will have unique flight dynamics, and while you can still stall a plane (if you really, really work at it), CRIMSON SKIES makes no claims of being a simulation. The designers are going for the *feel* of flight—not its reality.

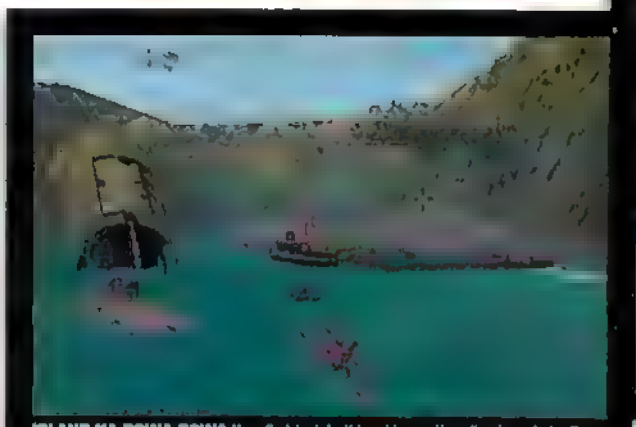
If it were a simulation, there'd be no way in hell you could pull off the kinds of aerial acrobatics Nathan Zachary will be asked to pull off in the course of an average mission. The designers are shooting for loads of Indiana Jones-style high adventure, where achieving the impossible is an every-mission affair. In one mission, Nathan Zachary decides he needs to steal the Spruce Goose, the enormous experimental aircraft developed by millionaire/aviator Howard Hughes, from its Long Beach, CA hangar. In Zachary's way are the Hollywood Knights, the nation of Hollywood's air militia led by the famous film starlet/air-combat pilot, Charlotte "Charlie" Steele. First, Zachary must engage a wave of Knights over the fully-realized lot of a Hollywood film studio, his guns sending enemy pilots careening into the faux Martian landscape of a Sci-Fi set. Then, he must fly through the Spruce Goose's hangar, deposit the agent who will steal the craft, and protect the Goose from more Knights and armed battle-zeppelins during its painfully long taxi, take-off, and escape. In other scenarios, Zachary is picking people up from moving trains with rope ladders extended from his plane, and parachuting out of it in order to land and steal another plane.

As if these stunts weren't enough for one day's work, each scenario has a number of side objectives. These "Danger Zones," as the designers are calling them, offer even more stunt-flying challenges above and beyond the central mission. The Danger Zones include lots of *Star Wars*-like "trench runs" and maneuvers under bridges and through canyons, skyscrapers, and train tunnels, as well as suicide runs against heavily-armed zeppelins and anti-aircraft positions.

The reward for surviving a Danger Zone—and the incentive for seeking them out—is Zachary's scrapbook, a novel and clever design twist for a scenario-based game. The idea is that after each mission, Zachary will compose a scrapbook of photos, stories, mission statistics, newspaper clippings, and personal momentos related to the mission. The collection of items will differ depending on how the player went about completing the mission's objective, and if he succeeded with any side objectives in Danger Zones. The designers hope to have several hundred different items that can make it into the scrapbook so that each player ends up with a unique composition at the end of the game. The designers are even making it easy to snap screenshots of scrapbook pages for uploading to the Web, so that players can compare and contrast.



WHAT'S A "LEARNING CURVE"? This sure ain't FALCON 4.0. Six gauges are all you'll need, if you even need those.



ISLAND KA-POWA-POWA Your first task in this raid on a Hawaiian base is to dispatch the battle zeppelin. Next, you go after the aircraft-carrier submarine.

THE LITTLE TRAIN THAT WON'T A Hughes-Lockheed Firebrand fires off a rocket that will surely steal all the pluck and gumption from this little choo-choo.

DOUBLE TROUBLE The twin-fuselage McDonnell 82B Kestrel airs out its 40-caliber cannons. Notice the "spyglass" at the top of the screen indicating the location of the player's next mission objective.

HEY GOOD LOOKIN'

The emphasis of the CRIMSON SKIES design is on constant action and loads of pyrotechnics, and the Zipper graphics engine seems well suited to the pixel-pumping task. The plane models are gorgeous, the action fast and fluid, and the weapon and damage effects look very cool—thanks to a "particle system" that renders minute particulate smoke, fire, dust, and exhaust. Clouds have layers of depth, so you can fly within canyons of fluff. The generic terrain below is not particularly impressive—a conscious design decision in order to get more detail on the planes and to keep the minimum system requirements at a P-200 with 32MB RAM—but the terrain that matters, like cities, bases, suburbs, and movie sets are populated with lots of structures and atmospheric details.

Over the course of his career, Zachary will have the pleasure of flying a number of different aircraft, the airframes of which seem to have been born of a collision between the experimental aircraft of the late-war Luftwaffe and the centerfolds of Hot Rod magazine. Each airframe will have unique flight dynamics, and the player can modify each before every mission. Guns and ammo, armor placement, engine, paint scheme, and nose art (which players can design and import into the game) can all be tweaked for maximum performance given the demands of a particular mission. Need burning magnesium rounds or drilling rockets to eat through tough enemy armor? Load 'em up. Or maybe you need "sonic blast" or "flash" rockets to temporarily incapacitate crack enemy pilots? There's even something of a guided missile that requires you to hit an enemy with a dumb "beacon rocket" before firing the homing rocket that will track and smack the marked enemy.

Once in the air, the gameplay is as streamlined as the aircraft. Again, the designers have chosen to promote unmitigated action over all else. The cockpit sports but a couple dials indicating speed, altitude, direction, and ammo status. There's no radar (historical accuracy, you see...), but there is a "spyglass" that appears on the edge of your screen displaying your closest target or mission objective. You'll fly with wingmen, but there are no wingman commands; however, your wingmen will chatter constantly to help you maintain your situational awareness.

This emphasis on simplification is the only point I can see where the design could stumble. How will gamers accustomed to "power systems management" in games like FREESPACE and WING COMMANDER feel about the lightened workload? Or the lack of damage modeling in the aircrafts' flight dynamics? Or the lack of control over wingmen? The designers are consciously bucking against entrenched conventions here. Will they buck too hard?

I don't know. But my hunch is that we'll be too enthralled with this game's overwhelming coolness quotient to really care. We may be too busy bagging bogeys while circling the Empire State building, and sinking aircraft-carrier submarines in their secret Hawaiian cove. We may be grooving too hard on the Count Basie sound (I know it sounds weird, but believe me, the music works!), and so caught up in the storyline to even notice.

All I can say for sure is that CRIMSON SKIES is the hippest, most colorful action game to come around since the muscle cars and funk of INTERSTATE '76. This alone will ensure that when this baby flies this summer, I'm going for the ride. CGW

THE BLACK SWAN Beautiful, deadly. And in no way Zachary's inevitable love-interest. Nope. No way. Nuh-uh.

www.crimsonskies.com If you're itching to know more about the CRIMSON SKIES universe, check out the official site where you'll find Spicy Air Tales, short stories based upon the CS world written by known fantasy authors.

www.teleport.com/~skytech/Akron.html Aircraft-carrier zeppelins? The CRIMSON SKIES designers aren't making this one up. Check out this site to learn more about the U.S.S. Akron and Macon, two airships designed to carry five fighter/scout planes.

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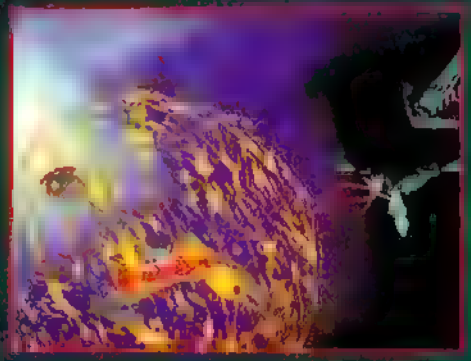

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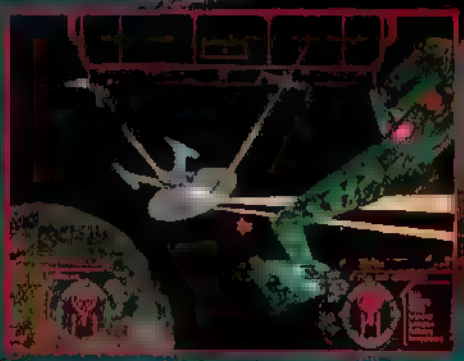

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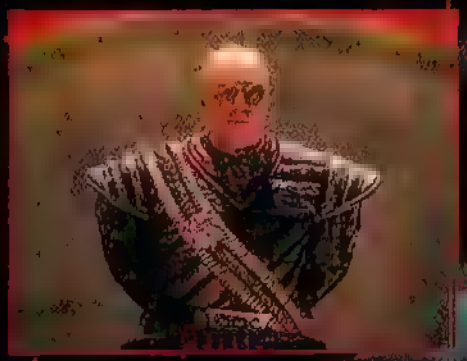

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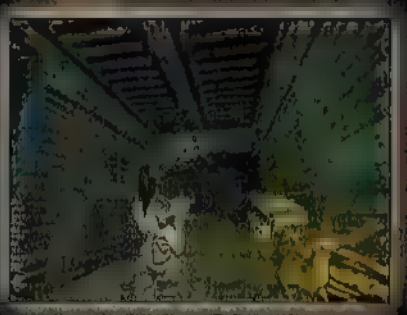

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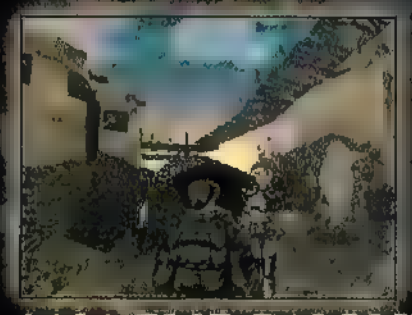

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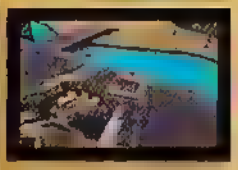
The 2000 Premier Awards

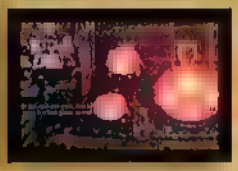
The Very Best of a Great Year in Gaming

Ask anyone who's worked at *Computer Gaming World* about the secret (and reportedly bizarre) ritual that goes on during the first week of the first month of every new year, and you're likely to get an evasive reply. No one will talk about the process...only the results.

This much is known: On the first Monday of any new year, the *CGW* editors disappear for a day. When they return from their top-secret location, they solemnly declare in their next issue the names of the finest computer games in each of the major genres (and some of the smaller ones). They also identify the game that transcended everything else, and is worthy of the title Best Game Of The Year.

Prepare to sing, laugh, and cry. We present to you the finest games of 1999.

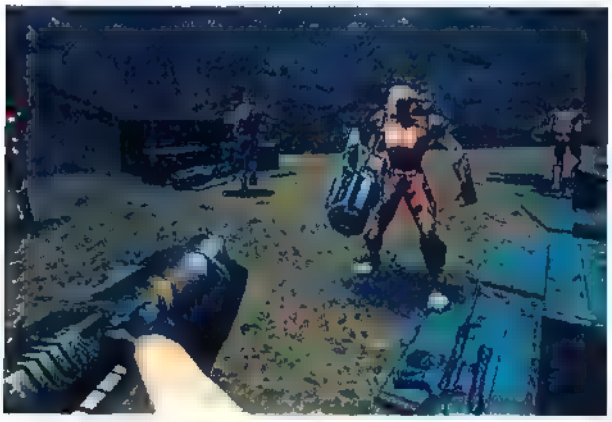


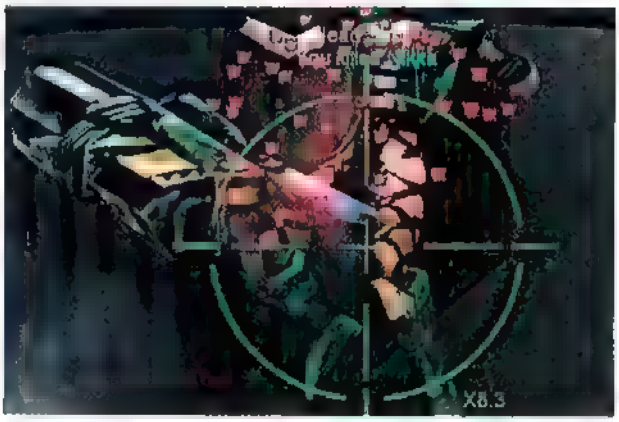


GAME OF THE YEAR

Unreal Tournament

PUBLISHER: GT Interactive • DEVELOPER: Epic Megagames • www.unrealtournament.com





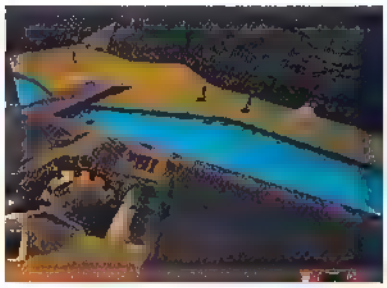
Last year, HALF-LIFE took the next step for single-player action games. This year, UNREAL TOURNAMENT (UT) proved itself to be the herald of the multiplayer experience, not just for action, but for all of gaming.

UT manages to capture the purity and fun of the first-person shooter, and then extends this to the online world with tremendous polish, permanently increasing our expectations of how rich and varied multiplayer gaming can be.

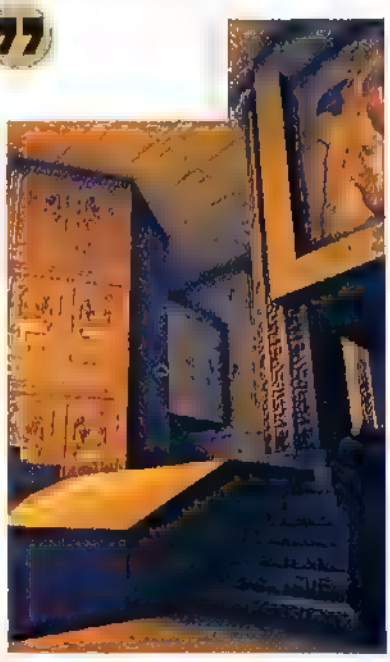
Out of the box, UT has a slew of gameplay options, from straight-ahead fragfests to the team-oriented Capture-The-Flag to the more strategic Domination, or even the cooler, mission-based Assault games. And, in addition to the core games, you can also engage several quirky game variants that will spice up your experience, such as Fatboy or Invisibility Arenas. And if you can't find any friends at all, you can always play against the Bots, one of the game's other surprises.

Last year, HALF-LIFE demonstrated perhaps the best computer opponents of any 3D shooter. Until now. UT'S Bots go much farther—so much so that, in a frightening analogue to the *Terminator* films, they act a little *too* human sometimes. They know their way around levels and they know how to use the various weapons. But the best testament to UT'S AI comes in team-based scenarios. While HALF-LIFE'S marines will scout and attack, UT's Bots will divide into teams that will scout, attack, defend, feint, and even hit you from multiple entry points.

On many occasions, great games are released that only diehard fans can fully appreciate. UT breaks through by being accessible to anyone. While multiplayer action gaming has been around since the DOOM days, its long-hyped potential is finally being realized. True multiplayer gaming is undoubtedly the future of gaming, and UT has become the standard by which that future will be judged.



> **On many occasions, great games are released that only diehard fans can fully appreciate. UT breaks through by being accessible to anyone.**



Inside the Smoke-Filled Offices of *CGW*

Never has picking a Game Of The Year been so hard. In recent years, it always seemed that we were blessed with one clear-cut choice for the most outstanding game. No such luck this time.

The voting came down to three candidates: UNREAL TOURNAMENT, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, and HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000. Talk about comparing apples, oranges, and fish. Each one of these titles took huge leaps in its genre. PLANESCAPE was a masterpiece of mature storytelling that riveted us like no RPG in recent memory. As for UNREAL and HIGH HEAT 2000, no two games were played more frequently or more obsessively in the *CGW* offices this year. So do we give the nod to the way HIGH HEAT 2000 merged console-style sports excitement with PC gaming depth? Do we acknowledge the wholly original world and superb artistry that PLANESCAPE gave us? Or do we go with the adrenaline rush of the first great multiplayer-only shooter?

After hours of arguing (and the locking up of vociferous HIGH HEAT 2000 advocate Robert Coffey into a tiny, unventilated cupboard), we went with UNREAL TOURNAMENT for the reasons you've just read. Ultimately, our advice to you is this: All three of these titles are must-plays – make sure you play them.

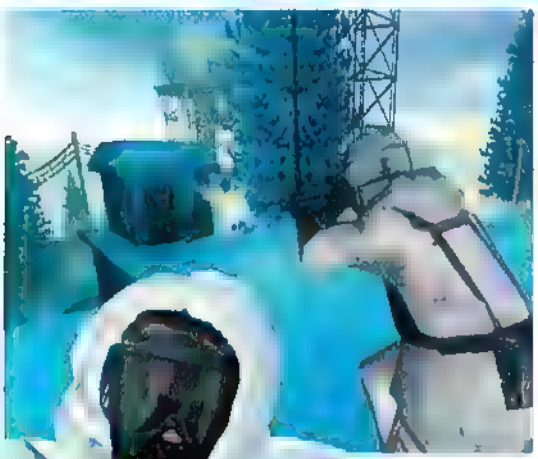
Past Winners of *CGW*'s Game Of The Year

1998	**Half-Life** (Sierra)
1997	**Jedi Knight** (LucasArts)
1996	**Diablo** (Blizzard)
1995	**Gabriel Knight 2** (Sierra)
1994	**X-COM** (Microprose)
1993	**Doom** (id Software)
1992	**Civilization** (Microprose)
1991	**Wing Commander** (Origin)
1990	**Railroad Tycoon** (Microprose)
1989	**SimCity** (Maxis)
1988	**Empire** (Interstel)
1987	**Earl Weaver Baseball** (EA)
1986	**Ultima IV** (Origin)
1985	**Kampfgruppe** (SSI)

ACTION GAME OF THE YEAR

Rainbow Six: Rogue Spear

PUBLISHER/ DEVELOPER: Red Storm • www.redstorm.com



Like a good Clancy novel, RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR is equal parts showmanship and technical *tour de force*, and the story is mere framework for the intense action. Like its predecessor, ROGUE SPEAR is based on the elite team of terrorist-killing commandos from Tom Clancy's *Rainbox Six*. Players equip their operatives with specialized weapons and equipment, plan their team's movement in exacting detail, and – if all goes well – bag the bad guys.

Runners Up

Quake 3: Arena (id Software)
Battlezone II (Activision)
S.W.A.T. 3 (Sierra)

The genius of the game lies in its immersiveness. Most of this is done through masterful graphics in imaginative settings such as a hijacked 747, snowy military bases, bomb-blasted cityscapes in Kosovo, and even a 400-year-old Persian fortress. Picking your way through these perilous environments, you issue orders to operatives who are so life-like that they breathe and blink. The intelligence of the tangos lying in wait presents challenges rivaling a good strategy game. Should you deploy the sniper and risk announcing your presence, or try sneaking up on a hostile to drop him with a silenced weapon? Do you have time for a stealthy approach, or will you sacrifice the hostages if you don't blitz the building? These gripping scenarios distinguish games like RAINBOW SIX and SWAT 3 from "run-and-gun" shooters, but ROGUE SPEAR goes far beyond its peers with a wider variety of missions, dramatic audio, demanding AI, and gut-wrenching suspense.

If the action is riveting in single-player, it's even better against human opponents. There are a huge number of multiplayer scenarios and user mods for ROGUE SPEAR on the Net, which add unlimited replayability to this outstanding combat experience. Red Storm's aim is right on target.

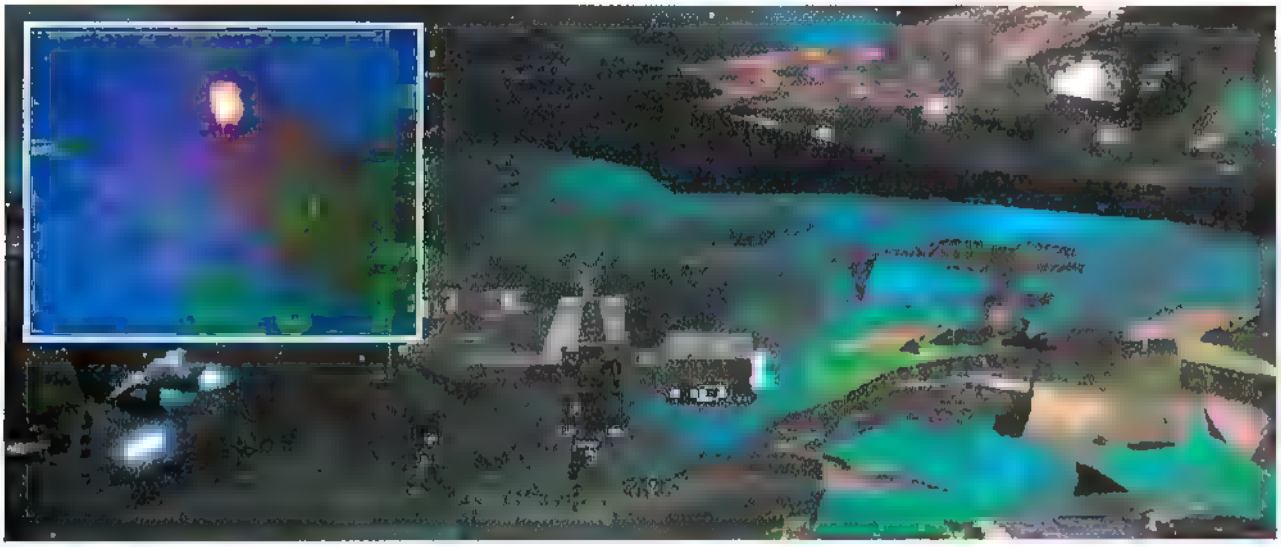
LOOKING AHEAD

So what do we anticipate seeing nominated next year? Well, no one at *CGW* can wait to dive into the team-based action of **TEAM FORTRESS 2** and **TRIBES 2**. **ONI**'s combination of high-kicking martial arts action and shooter combat should land it a nomination, as should the high-flying daredevilry of this month's cover subject, **CRIMSON SKIES**. And if we're all really, really lucky we could see **OBI WAN**, **HALO**, and **HALF-LIFE 2** gracing the 2000 Premier Awards – if they come out.

The Year's Guilty Pleasures

Nintendo, Sega, and the 1980s played pivotal roles in the lives of the *CGW* editor in 1999...all three distracted us to the point of destruction. At the top of the list sits the travelling analgesic, the Game Boy Color, through which we discovered the POKÉMON way, and lost many, many hours of our lives in the surprisingly excellent, old-school, role-playing gameplay within. Thanks, Nintendo. No, really – we like having people smirk at us on airplanes, buses and trains.

Another major distraction of the year included Hanaho's awesome classic video-game PC system, which included a slew of classic coin-op arcade games; and the Sega Dreamcast, which got us hooked for hours at a time on games like SOUL CALIBUR and NFL 2000.



SCIENCE FICTION SIMULATION OF THE YEAR

Freespace 2

PUBLISHER: Interplay • DEVELOPER: Volition Inc. • www.interplay.com

While last year's winner – INDEPENDENCE WAR – was based on innovation, this year we're giving the award to the best traditional space sim since TIE FIGHTER. While LucasArts and Origin usually dominate the domain of the dogfight, Interplay brought us a space sim with the frantic fun of the sci-fi gun duel combined with exceptional polish and refreshing newness.

It's often said that this genre attempts to capture the flavor of WWII dogfights. FREESPACE 2 embodies this notion. It manages to inject the WWII flavor without sacrificing the sci-fi angle. bombing runs against capital ships are met with flak, and ship-to-ship combat lacks only gravity. While many other space sims do a great job of providing the sensation of dueling with other craft, FREESPACE 2 ups this by adding massive, epic battles between carriers and destroyers.

FREESPACE 2 should also get credit for its stunning visuals. QUAKE III ARENA and UT look good, but can you see four beam weapons cut a massive enemy carrier in half in a 3D shooter? Watching a fleet battle in FREESPACE 2 is akin to watching the very best special-effect scenes in *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, or *Babylon 5*.

All in all, FREESPACE 2 takes many of the conventions of the great space sims before it, adds some new twists and tweaks, and emerges to be the best there was for 1999.

Runners Up

Heavy Gear 2 (Activision)
Mechwarrior 3 (Hasbro)
X-Wing Alliance (LucasArts)

LOOKING AHEAD

We put our prediction for next year's Game Of The Year squarely on Chris Robert's upcoming magnum opus, **FREELANCER**. Anyone who's been itching to experience **PRIVATEER** in the massively-multiplayer sense will want to watch out for this title (assuming it makes its end-of-2000 ship date).

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT

★ Tchotchke of the Year ★

The CDV Gnome

The *CGW* offices are awash in promotional crap. Or, as we call it in polite company, *tchotchkes*. T-shirts, mugs, tote bags, and toys – all this stuff sent by game companies to make sure we have their games at the forefront of our minds. Of course, the scheme doesn't work, because everyone does it, and they usually send boring stuff.

This year's number-one exception to the mundane rule is the Garden Gnome given to us by CDV Software, a small German game publisher. The gnome has nothing to do with their game – a WWII strategy RTS – it's just "German." Thank you CDV, for this little gift of love, and congratulations on besting a horde of highly-paid marketing professionals!

Haiku on a Gnome:
Red lips, bright eyes, cap.
You beckon. I run to love.
Sit in my garden.

STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR

Homeworld

PUBLISHER: Sierra Studios • DEVELOPER: Relic Entertainment • www.sierrastudios.com

The word "immersive" is a term that most gaming journalists have expelled from their vocabulary, but there really is no better word to describe HOMEWORLD. Utilizing gorgeous deep-space imagery, dramatic music (including a well placed "Adagio for Strings" by Samuel Barber), and short but informative cut scenes, the designers at Relic created an almost cinematic game around their *Battlestar Galactica*-inspired space opera. You can't help but feel a little bit lost and alone yourself as you gingerly escort the remnants of your civilization through uncharted space in search of a new (or possibly old) home.

A real-time strategy game that explodes the ground-bound, top-down, tech-tree conventions of the genre in ways destined to be imitated again and again, HOMEWORLD offers a truly unique gaming experience. The incredible 3D spatial design, coupled with an easy-to-use camera system, really gave gamers the sense of commanding a huge fleet of craft moving realistically though space.

In many ways, HOMEWORLD is reminiscent of last year's HALF-LIFE – which set a mood and maintained it until the end. HALF-LIFE had a compelling, well-told story at its core and so does HOMEWORLD. Interestingly, both games were debuts from new developers and both were published by Sierra.

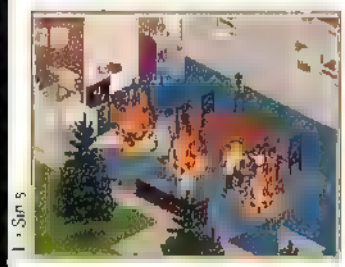
HOMEWORLD follows a very simple recipe for making a great game, an original concept executed to near perfection. The result is a title that deserves *CGW*'s Strategy Game Of The Year award, as well as serious kudos for each of its distinctive design elements.

Runners Up

Alpha Centauri (Firaxis)
Age of Empires 2 (Microsoft)
Dungeon Keeper 2 (Bullfrog)
Jagged Alliance 2 (Sir-Tech Canada)

LOOKING AHEAD

We expect that Maxis' **THE SIMS** will pretty much grind our magazine production to a halt next year. Then again, Peter Molyneux and Lionhead Studios' visionary **BLACK & WHITE** has just as much of a chance of killing *CGW* as any title. And now that we think of it, **FORCE COMMANDER**'s real-time *Star Wars* strategy action and **DARK REIGN 2**'s gorgeous 3D world should pretty much be the final nail in our coffin.



SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT

★ Best Weapons ★

The Trebuchet from Age of Empires 2

A weapon is the gamer's bread and butter. And a great weapon is his pride and joy. This year, our joyful cup runneth over, as a number of games sported weapons that went above and beyond the call of doleful duty. Take the nasty Chem Missile from COMMAND

WARGAME OF THE YEAR

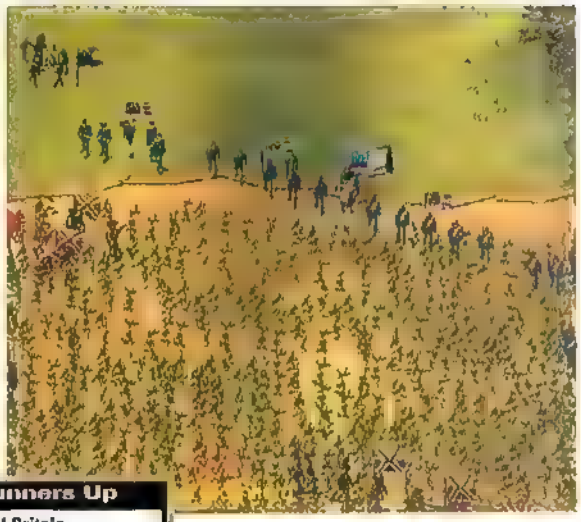
Sid Meier's Antietam!

PUBLISHER: Firaxis • www.firaxis.com

1999 marks the first year that one of our Premier Award winners could only be purchased online. While some games can only be *played* online, they've always been available in stores or distributed as shareware. SID MEIER S ANTIETAM is a grand experiment by Firaxis to test the popularity of online-only distribution for commercial releases.

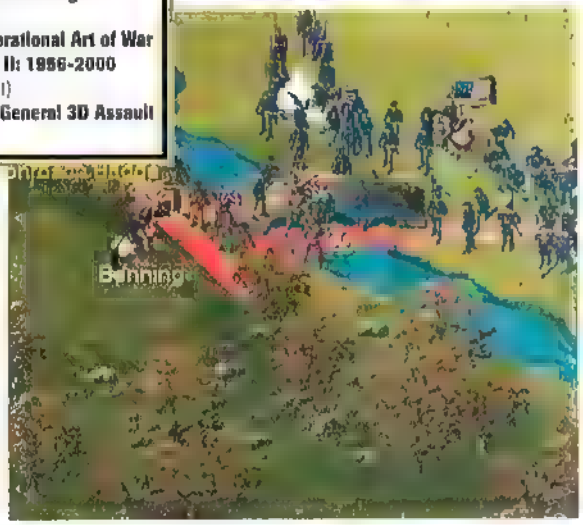
Apart from its distribution, there's nothing revolutionary about ANTIETAM. It's a carefully refined update of SID MEIER'S GETTYSBURG, the real-time Civil War game that earned our Premier Wargame Award in 1997. ANTIETAM uses the same 2D engine – so the graphics aren't stunning – but the units are finely detailed and the soldiers now bear a variety of uniform styles. You'll hardly notice these touches during a game, however, because ANTIETAM is the epitome of a Sid Meier design: intensely absorbing and wickedly punishing. Whether you play the whole battle (an 11-hour marathon) or the individual scenarios from either the Confederate or Union side, you'll be faced with an opponent who makes rapid use of terrain and exploits any weakness in your line. You could spend hundreds of hours with the single-player game, and the random-scenario generator and online play offer hours of unlimited replayability.

ANTIETAM has been criticized for small things – including its graphics, occasionally choppy frame-rate, and the fact that it's not a big leap from GETTYSBURG. But it does offer every feature a serious Civil War gamer could want, in an interface that's accessible to casual strategists. In a year when few wargames were released – and when those that did come out were inferior to their predecessors (OPERATIONAL ART OF WAR II, PANZER GENERAL 3D) – ANTIETAM takes the high ground. Only CLOSE COMBAT: BATTLE OF THE BULGE offered serious competition but AI quirks and mysteriously reincarnating units held it back.



Runners Up

Battle of Britain
(TalonSoft)
Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge
(SSI)
The Operational Art of War Volume II: 1956-2000
(TalonSoft)
Panzer General 3D Assault
(SSI)



LOOKING AHEAD

If ANTIETAM! sells well, next year we can expect a series of new wargames from Firaxis under the Sid Meier name. But the wargame we're looking forward to right now is TalonSoft's **RISING SUN**, a platoon-level slugfest set in the Pacific Theater of WW II. Get ready to storm Guadalcanal in 2000.

& CONQUER 2. Nothing said "screw you" like this noxious blast, which destroyed buildings and sent out a nasty cloud of vapor that turned the victim's units against him.

For sheer power, nothing beat the UNREAL TOURNAMENT Flak Cannon, which not only could decimate an opponent with one shot at close range, but could take out a weakened opponent around corners with its ricocheting shrapnel.

But it's not all about raw power. Finesse counts, too. Pedro Martinez was a devastating force in HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 when he combined his overpowering fastball, wicked slider, and psychologically debilitating change-up.

Finally, though, nothing married destructive force with grace like the trebuchet in AGE OF EMPIRES 2. This wonder of ancient engineering hurled boulders that could, in seconds, destroy the wonder of a rival empire that took hundreds of years to build. The graceful arc of its swing was a kinetic poem to the creative and destructive forces that battle within the human soul.

"...resistance is futile."

- PC Accelerator

"A virtually flawless masterpiece"

- Future Gamer

"... will shake up the gaming landscape"

- CNET

" a next-generation game in every sense..."

- The Adrenaline Vault

"The 3D shooter for the next millennium."

- gamesmania.com

"...I have to tell you, it's pretty damn cool"

- IGN.com

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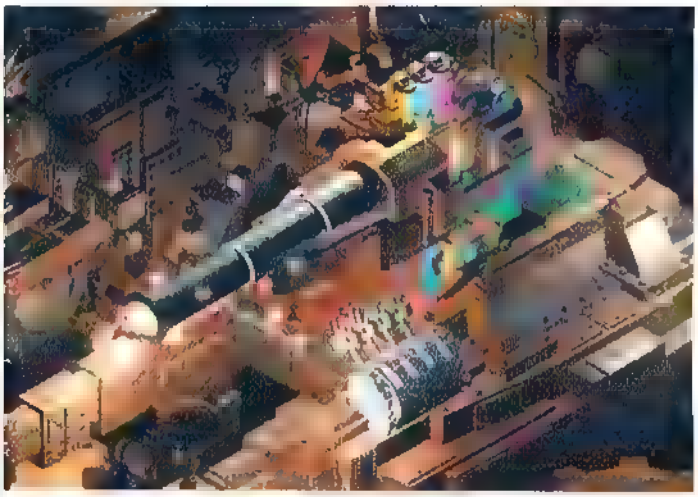
ROLE-PLAYING GAME OF THE YEAR

Planescape: Torment

PUBLISHER: Interplay • DEVELOPER: Black Isle Studios • www.interplay.com



Last year's BALDUR'S GATE may have been an excellent *AD&D* role-player, but it was still classic *AD&D* – broadswords and magic missiles, faeries and elves. Contrast this with PLANESCAPE: TORMENT's singing maces and floating skulls. PT is Salvador Dali to BALDUR'S GATE's Edward Hopper. It's new, it's surreal, it's fresh, and while the other is a fine example of tradition, ultimately, this is the one that's more intriguing.

What is it about PLANESCAPE: TORMENT that made it RPG Of The Year? Sheer originality and willingness to be thought-provoking. The design team took many of the issues gamers have with RPGs, and devised completely new twists to address them. The main character's immortal nature means that death is no longer a reason to reload; in fact, death is often needed to jar new memories or to bypass puzzles. Combat isn't the only solution to a given problem, using your brain or charisma can solve many quests. This award-winner also manages to parody some diehard RPG traditions. A side quest takes you to a grand experiment in randomly generated mazes filled with Foozles and loot, all to "discover what is the appeal behind the dungeon."

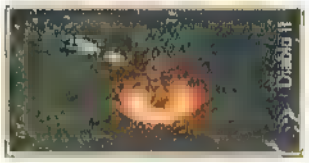
The quality of writing in PLANESCAPE: TORMENT also elevates it over other RPGs. Not only did the design team create a compelling story behind the most tired of clichés (waking up with amnesia), they also wrote dialogue that never insults your intelligence. Oftentimes, the dialogue stops being filler and starts being philosophical debates on topics like entropy or the will to live. At times, the writing surpasses even the mighty ULTIMA IV in dealing with ethical dilemmas.

While there were many contenders – most notably EVERQUEST and SYSTEM SHOCK 2 – PLANESCAPE: TORMENT excels at combining all of its design elements, and hence this imaginative game is our RPG Of The Year.

Runners Up

- **EverQuest** (989 Studios)
- **System Shock 2** (Looking Glass)
- **Might & Magic VII** (3DO)
- **Asheron's Call** (Microsoft)

LOOKING AHEAD



There are so many huge RPGs coming out in 2000 that it's exhausting us already to think about which one might win an award. Looming over the genre, and over gaming in general, is Blizzard's long-awaited DIABLO II – the monster release of the year. But posing extremely tough competition are those heavy hitters: Ion Storm's DEUS EX, Interplay's BALDUR'S GATE II and NEVERWINTER NIGHTS, Sierra's ARCANUM, and SSI's POOL OF RADIANCE: RUINS OF MYTH DRANNOR. And that's just the tip of the iceberg. This is your moment, RPG fans. Enjoy it.

ADVENTURE GAME OF THE YEAR

Outcast

PUBLISHER: Infogrames • DEVELOPER: Appeal • www.outcast-thegame.com

One good thing about living in Belgium – other than the waffles – is that they apparently haven't heard about the supposed "death of adventure games" over there. Thank goodness, because if Belgian game-developer Appeal had been as down on the genre as the rest of the industry, they might never have made OUTCAST our choice for 1999's Adventure Game Of The Year.

It's an unusual choice, we know. For one thing, OUTCAST is more like an adventure/action hybrid than a "pure" adventure. But what we love about OUTCAST – especially in comparison to its only competitor, Sierra's much higher-profile GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 – and what ultimately gave it the edge in our minds, is that this game always stays true to its vision, however goofy that may be. Fundamentally, adventure games tell stories, and OUTCAST told a great one, about a Schwarzenneggerian commando sent to a parallel world to fix a black hole where he is promptly mistaken for a god by the local alien population. As you play the game, the plot expands as you go forward, surrounding you with a large cast of colorful characters and personalities to interact with and engaging you in dialogue that is surprisingly and refreshingly funny throughout.

Runner Up
Gabriel Knight 3
(Sierra)

The game's art direction is equally compelling. No one will mistake OUTCAST's voxel based engine for UNREAL TOURNAMENT, but Appeal proved it could create some wondrous outdoor environments this way – without making gamers buy a 3D card. The cinematic camera angles and truly great musical score (performed by the Moscow Symphony Orchestra) both add greatly to the game's epic feel.

It was a slim year for adventure games, to be sure, but that in no way should diminish the achievement of OUTCAST, a game that told a great story in a confident, compelling and entertaining way – something that all the great adventure games do.

LOOKING AHEAD

The biggest question in the adventure game genre is not what might win the award in 2000, but whether we'll even be handing one out. It's that grim. You can pretty much count on one hand the adventure games in development. The coolest ones we've seen both hail from Europe – THE LONGEST JOURNEY from Norway's Funcom, and THE REAL NEVERENDING STORY from Germany's Discreet Monsters.

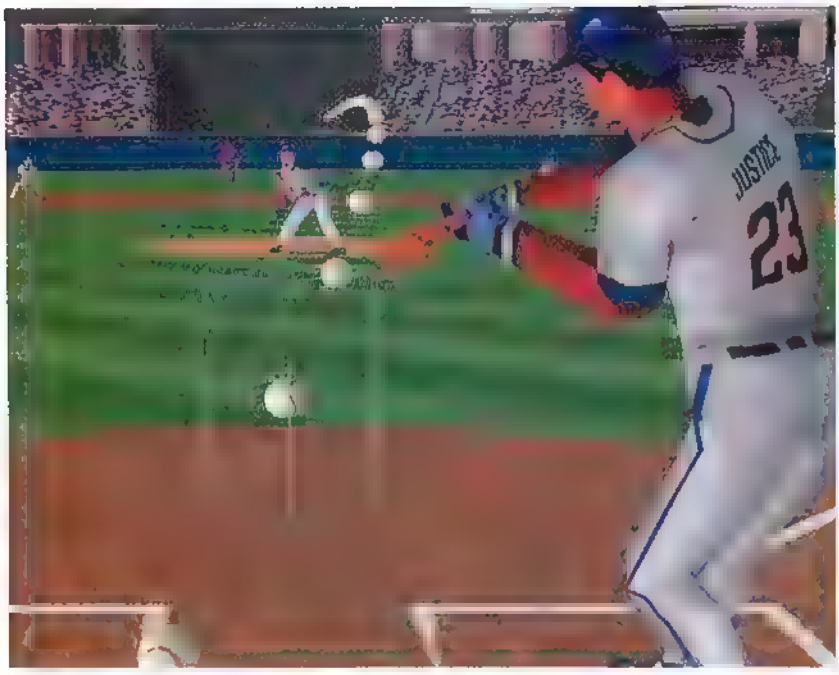
The Real Neverending Story

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT

★ Best Character ★

Morte from Planescape: Torment

In a year with memorable characters like the villainous SHODAN in SYSTEM SHOCK 2 and the menacing Guardian of ULTIMA fame, the best character of the year turns out to be Morte, the floating-skull sidekick in PLANESCAPE: TORMENT. At first, Morte's wit and sarcasm make him merely a comedian, *a la* Murray (another disembodied skull, this time from CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND). Yet, the moment Morte tells the story of why he's with you, he elevates himself from mere comic relief to become one of those characters you truly care about. Not since Floyd (from the ancient PLANETFALL) has comedy and tragedy mixed itself so well within a single character, much less a sidekick. We applaud the design team of PLANESCAPE: TORMENT for writing such a rich, memorable character.



SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

High Heat 2000

PUBLISHER: 3DO • DEVELOPER: Team .366 • www.3do.com

From the moment we installed HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000, we knew there really wouldn't be much of a contest for Sports Game Of The Year. While our other nominees were content to incrementally advance the state of their respective sports, HIGH HEAT 2000 revolutionized its sport, snatching the "Best Computer Baseball Game Of All Time" crown from *CGW* Hall of Famer EARL WEAVER BASEBALL. It redefines what a baseball game – and maybe even a *sports* game – should be.

Runners Up

John Madden Football 2000 (EA Sports)
Jack Nicklaus 6: Golden Bear Challenge (Activision)
NFL Fever 2000 (Microsoft)
NBA Live 2000 (EA Sports)

Like no other game before it, HIGH HEAT 2000 captured the intangible essence of baseball. The pitcher/batter confrontation – the soul of baseball – was just about perfect, with every at-bat a struggle complete with subtle mind games that blossomed pitch by pitch. And for pure gaming satisfaction, no game this year could match the feeling of striking out another human player with HIGH HEAT's beautifully modeled, cruelly devastating change-up.

That HIGH HEAT could keep you hooked throughout the grind of a long season is only further testament to the beauty of the game. As in real life, the game managed to show you something new, something unexpected in almost every game, from heartbreaking final-pitch losses to exhilarating, fluke hit victories. Teams grew from just a roster of names into a collection of players with personalities and character: the always disappointing all-star, the clutch pinch-hitter, the unnervingly unpredictable middle reliever, and the number-five starter that heroically gutted through eight grueling innings to pitch a key victory.

It all managed to recreate perfectly the highs and lows a fan experiences–the sunny promise of Opening Day; the nail-biting final games of a pennant race – making HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000 not only the Best Sports Game Of The Year, but simply one of the best games of the year. Period.

LOOKING AHEAD

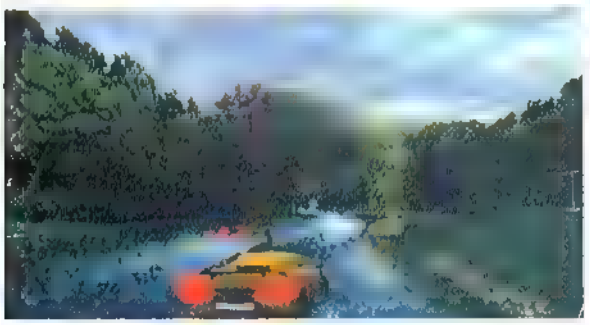
Considering what 3DO accomplished last year – and what we've seen in the early alpha builds of HIGH HEAT 2001 – this franchise is definitely a front runner for the best game of 2000. But there could be some surprises in store. Keep an eye on Microsoft's follow-up to this year's strong NFL FEVER 2000. And TIGER WOODS 2001 will allow virtual duffers to play against the pros in major tournaments, an innovation that could net it some accolades.

High Heat 2001

RACING GAME OF THE YEAR

Need For Speed: High Stakes

PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts • www.needforspeed.com



Runners Up

Midtown Madness (Microsoft)

Star Wars Episode One: Racer (LucasArts)

Re*Volt (Acclaim)

Superbike World Championship (EA Sports)

For a lesson in how to make a sequel and build a successful franchise, you needn't look any further than the NEED FOR SPEED series from Electronic Arts.

NEED FOR SPEED III won *CGW*'s 1998 Premier award for driving games because it skirted the line between a hardcore racing sim and an arcade racer. Its follow-up, NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES, wins the award this year for maintaining the awesome gameplay of its predecessor, while adding so much more. HIGH STAKES offered over a dozen tracks that can be raced backwards, mirrored, or both. Following a trend set by the superb PlayStation title GRAN TURISMO, HIGH STAKES also included a career mode with a detailed financial model that allowed you to earn money by winning races, and then spend it on upgrades and repairs for your car. And the hot-pursuit play mode introduced in NFSIII was expanded to let you play as the police, or as a member of a pack of scofflaws.

Technically the game is masterful, with improved graphics and a more realistic physics model that includes some eerily realistic force-feedback effects. The cars are lovingly rendered with 3D interiors and animated drivers. In essence, NFS HS builds upon the greatness of NFSIII by giving us more, more, more. Next year's installment, NEED FOR SPEED: MOTOR CITY looks to take the series to the next level once again.

While we enjoyed the novelty of RE*VOLT, the setting of MIDTOWN MADNESS, and the blinding speed of EPISODE I: RACER, the sublime qualities of NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES set it head and hubcaps above the rest.

LOOKING AHEAD

We've been lucky enough to get some sneak peeks at racing titles slated for next year that, if they fulfill their early promise, could be contenders for next year's awards. **MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2** from Microsoft is boasting a slick graphics engine and myriad gameplay options, while **NFS: MOTOR CITY** will be the first racing-oriented persistent online universe.

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT

★ Sleeper Hit of the Year ★

Re*Volt

Sometimes a game flies in under our radar – under everyone's radar – that turns out to not only be really good, but insanely addictive. RE*VOLT surprised the hell out of us when it was released this past Fall. The concept – racing remote-controlled toy cars – we've seen before, but never with such style. The engine was one of the best 3D engines we saw all year, and the real-world environments (the supermarket is our favorite) gave a great sense of scale for these tiny vehicles.

RE*VOLT's cars sound like the real RC thing...and handle like them too. Add in great weapons – from bottle rockets to oil slicks, and you've got *Mad Max* for the Toughskins set.

KANE IS DEAD

A NEW ENEMY

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HAS EMERGED

COMMAND & CONQUER
TIBERIAN SUN
FIRESTORM
EXPANSION PACK

NEW GDI & NOD UNITS
NEW MULTIPLAYER MAPS
ALL NEW WORLD DOMINATION TOURNAMENTS
ENHANCED BATTLEFIELD RANDOMIZER
NEW UNIT UPGRADES
INDIGENOUS LIFE FORMS

Westwood

for the inside scoop, www.westwood.com

SIMULATION OF THE YEAR

MiG Alley

PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive • DEVELOPER: Rowan Software • www.empire-us.com

In a down year for flight simulations, one shone as brightly as a ray of light piercing through a thunderhead. MIG ALLEY covered an era that has been long-overlooked (the Korean War), but which offers a fascinating prospect for virtual pilots: the first jet-versus-jet air war. While configurable enough to give novices a good ride, the game's highest realism levels yield an experience the most discriminating of flight fanatics will relish. You can hear every creak and groan of these first-generation jets as you push them to the edge of their capabilities. The aircraft all have their own idiosyncrasies, and every graphic detail of these jets – beautiful in an ugly way that only a military aviation fan can appreciate – is perfectly modeled.

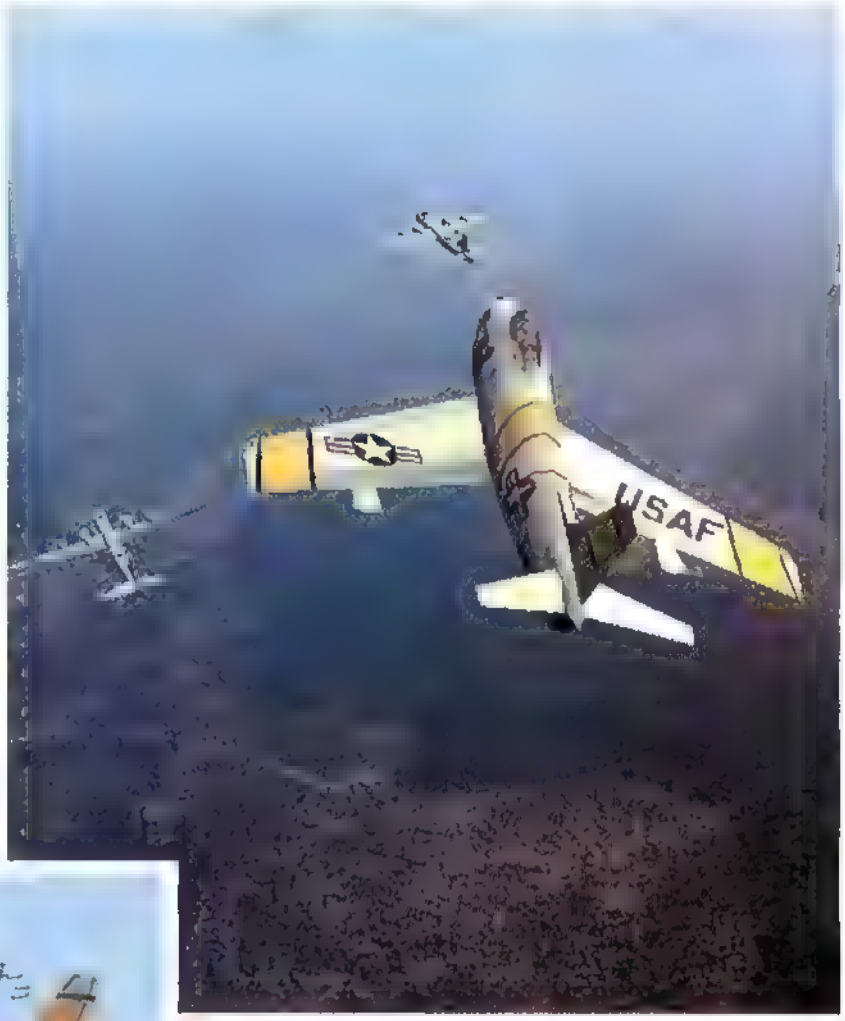
Runners Up

Jane's USAF
(Electronic Arts)

Flight Unlimited 3
(Looking Glass)

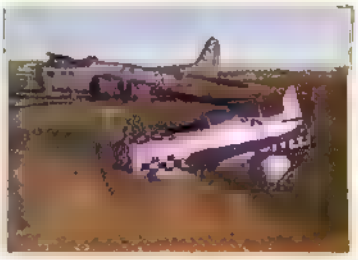
Apache Havoc
(Empire)

Back then, cannons were the weapon of the day, so lightning-fast jousts were the typical engagement. MIG ALLEY ably captures this dynamic, and may in fact feature the best pure dogfighting in any sim until now. The AI is also surprisingly human: A veteran computer pilot may fly to the edge of his plane's capabilities and sometimes beyond, while a rookie pilot may panic and bail out of his plane as soon as you pepper him with cannon fire. Attack a pair of opposing aircraft, and one plane might draw you off while his wingman sneaks behind you and stitches your six. Add to this a dynamic campaign that is a strategic game in and of itself, allowing you to prioritize enemy assets, target them, and then set up – in great detail – all of the strike packages, and you have a sim that will be flown for years to come.



LOOKING AHEAD

1999 was a tough year for digital fly-boys, with the cancellation of several high-profile titles, and the dismantling of MicroProse's august FALCON team. But despite these setbacks, 2000 still has some very promising titles in the works including MicroProse's **B–17 FLYING FORTRESS II**, HiTech Creation's **ACES HIGH**, and Looking Glass Studio's first stab at a combat sim: **FLIGHT COMBAT: THUNDER OVER EUROPE**.



B-17 Flying Fortress II

PUZZLES/CLASSICS GAME OF THE YEAR

Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey

PUBLISHER: Empire Interactive • DEVELOPER: Cunning Developments • www.empire-us.com

Nobody does quick-fix classic gaming like Cunning Developments and Empire Interactive. Last year's BIG RACE U.S.A was perhaps the best pinball game – digital or physical – we've ever played. This year's FANTASTIC JOURNEY is not quite up to BIG RACE, but it's still far and away the best game in its category.

The ball physics in these games are practically virtual reality, and the table designs are clever and deep, with dozens of special shots and mini "quests" that must be fulfilled on your journey towards a high score. FANTASTIC JOURNEY's Jules Verne theme is developed through myriad sounds and animations that play out on the overhead display. The only drawbacks: The music is annoying as hell, and the gameplay is so addictive that you'll never get a thing done if you're fool enough to load the game on your work computer. Hands down, FANTASTIC JOURNEY offers the best 10-minute servings of gaming you'll find.

Runners Up

Mind Gym
(Simon & Schuster)

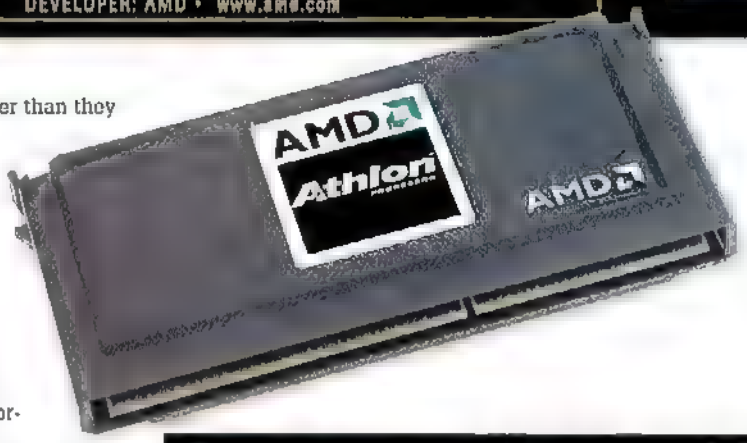
Pandora's Box
(Microsoft)

Chessmaster 7000
(Mindscape)

GAMING TECHNOLOGY OF THE YEAR

AMD Athlon CPU

DEVELOPER: AMD • www.amd.com



"Objects in mirror are larger than they appear." Intel's CEO, Craig Barrett, no doubt sees an AMD logo in his rear view mirror – and it's looming larger all the time. Most challengers to Intel are still licking their wounds, unable to keep up with Intel's clock speeds and floating-point performance. But when AMD shipped the Athlon in 1999, the market for high performance, x86-compatible CPUs was no longer a near-monopoly. Gamers quickly discovered that Athlon's fast, three-issue floating point unit (FPU) was as fast or faster than the equivalent Intel FPU. This made for superb 3D-gaming performance. For months, Intel trailed AMD, until Intel's Coppermine CPUs shipped. Even then, they only substantially exceeded Athlon in gaming performance by using fairly exotic RDRAM memory. What AMD accomplished in 1999 was a major coup: Their new CPU completely reshaped the performance PC marketplace, and AMD is now slugging it out toe-to-toe with Intel's best.

PC makers hungry for an alternative quickly began shipping Athlon-based systems. Gamers, always looking for great performance at low prices, snapped up the new systems. All-in-all, it's been a rosy success story for Santa Clara-based AMD. If there's any dark lining in this silver cloud, it's been the lagging technology in the motherboard chipsets and L2 cache. That is quickly changing, however, as AMD embeds L2 cache, and as chipset makers introduce new technology like AGP 4x and DDR SDRAM. Make no mistake: Athlon systems are fast, and can make for superb gaming. All you need is sound, fast video, and an ATA/66 hard drive. Competition is sweet indeed.

Doorstop of the Year

Thrustmaster Fragmaster

We have seen some poor attempts to solve the "first-person-shooter problem," that supposed affliction that prevents gamers from using the mouse/keyboard combination in 3D shooters. But Thrustmaster's Fragmaster has got to be one of the worst. Thrusty's ill-fated attempt brought together a so-so design with bad execution to produce this year's Doorstop Of The Year.

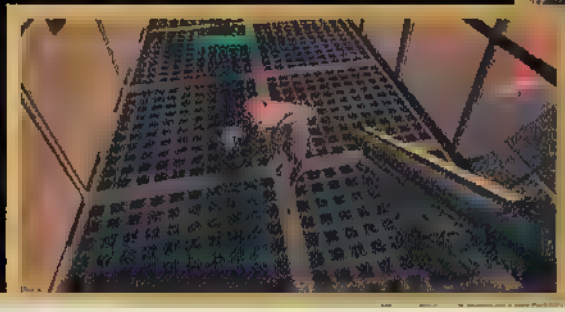
The Fragmaster was marred by serious driver problems and poor performance that had most buyers fuming, not to mention that Thrustmaster was slow to pull the product off store shelves after realizing there were problems. For a company that's been such a friend to gamers over the year, this was a dark chapter in its history. Here's hoping that under Guillemot's ownership, Thrusty will rediscover their commitment to quality gaming peripherals.

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT

★ Best Sound Design ★

System Shock 2

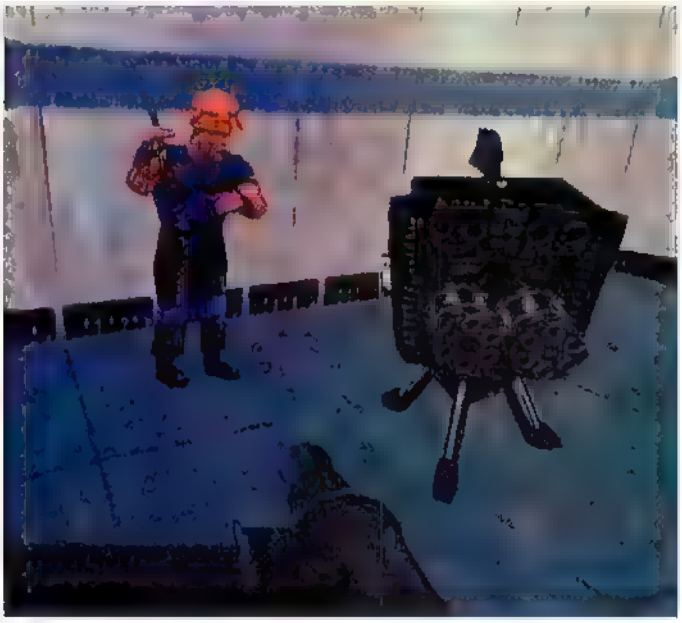
Considering the almost complete lack of interaction with any other character in the game, the way SYSTEM SHOCK 2 hooked you with a compelling story told almost solely through audio is testament to the game's stellar sound design. The best voice-acting in recent memory created a pervasive sense of menace through the haunting words of the dead in recorded logs and emails. The other sounds were just as compelling, specifically the tortured laments of the Hybrids, the perverted maternal cooing of the vicious Midwives, and the chillingly evil directives of the steely queen-bitch herself, Shodan. Echoing voices throughout the derelict spaceships promised that a violent death forever lurked just around the next corner.



MULTIPLAYER GAME OF THE YEAR

Team Fortress Classic

PUBLISHER: Sierra • DEVELOPER: Valve • www.sierrastudios.com



The TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC mod for HALF-LIFE engrossed us so thoroughly that, for a while, this free multiplayer add-on received serious consideration for Game Of The Year Valve should be commended for this instant classic, which has spawned hundreds of clans around the world One of the very few titles to combine class- and character-based gaming with an action environment *and* the type of objective-laced missions that are now becoming standard fare for 3D-shooters, TFC upped the ante to the point that it's just now being approached by the competition

Once we played the Hunted scenario – in which one team protects a president trying to reach an SUV before being assassinated by the other team – we realized two things. First, Valve is way ahead of the game Second, we absolutely cannot wait to get our hands on TEAM FORTRESS 2

Runners Up

Quake 3 (id Software)
Unreal Tournament (GT Interactive)
EverQuest (989 Studios)
Age of Empires 2 (Microsoft)

ARTISTIC & DESIGN ACHIEVEMENT

★ Best Level Design ★

Unreal Tournament

Too many times, action games stick to a strict theme, such as gothic castles or space stations. UNREAL TOURNAMENT's only theme is "fun combined with looks." With levels on pirate ships, mountainous monasteries, WWII-style beachheads, and runaway trains, UNREAL TOURNAMENT gets the nod for providing levels with a good mix of gameplay and aesthetics.

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND The transcendent Mynarchlast (shown here) proves that levels can both look good and make for fun frugging.

★ Best Voice Acting ★

The Keeper From Dungeon Keeper 2

Indulgently wallowing in the deliciousness of all that is evil, the silky baritone of the Keeper from DUNGEON KEEPER 2 did more to set the mood of the game than any of the other sounds or graphics. Every tantalizing word that dripped from his mouth was like a drop of rancid honey, conspiratorially speaking to your dark side and drawing you deeper into the game until you too could gleefully chortle at the misfortunes of heroes, delight in the suffering of the good, and relish the torment of your enemies. Being bad never sounded so good

★ Best Manual ★

Homeworld

What's the deal with .game manuals? Too many companies skimp on their written support, cramming barebones info onto a CD booklet or, worse, burying all you need to know in a half-assed online manual that hurts *you* while saving *them* paper costs. Not so the manual for HOMEWORLD. Composed by Montgomery E. Crabapple, this game's manual not only concisely and expertly gave players all the information they need to play, but enriched and informed the game's outstanding story. Well done, Monty

★ Interface Design ★

Age of Empires II

If you want to really appreciate the dozens of interface enhancements made in AGE OF EMPIRES 2, go back and try to play the original AGE OF EMPIRES. It's like stepping back a couple hundred years in history. How did we ever live without the unit formations? Or the right-click way-point interface? Or the idle peasant key? Well, at least we won't have to live without them again, for AOE 2 is the new standard in real-time strategy interfaces.

WE CLICKED WITH AGE 2 Actually, we clicked less in AOE2 than in most RTS, thanks to the elegant interface design.

★ Best Soundtrack ★

NBA Live 2000

EA Sports knows that hip-hop is the unofficial music of professional basketball, so with NBA LIVE 2000, they included some of the best rap, funk, and hip-hop music to ever grace a computer game. Original cuts by Rahzel are bolstered by classics from Naughty by Nature, Run D.M.C., and George Clinton. To quote a wise old sage (or maybe it was Bootsy Collins), "they got the funk."

The *CGW* staff would like to thank Gordon Berg, Loyd Case, Desslock, Marc Dultz, Bruce Geryk, Kenneth Johnson, Jason Kapalka, and Jeff Lackey for their contribution of words and ideas to this story.

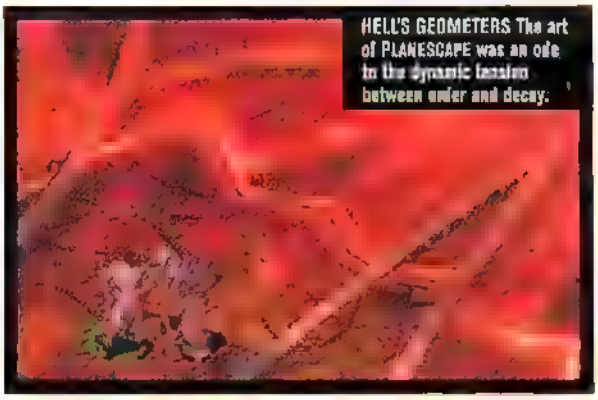
★ Art Direction ★

Planescape: Torment

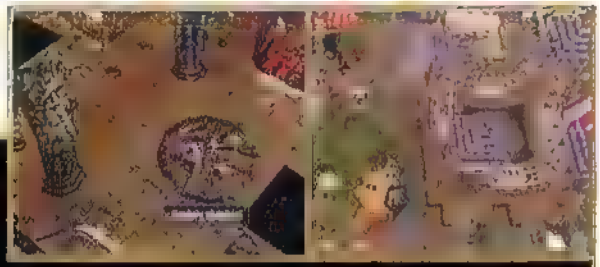
It's not the graphics, it's the gameplay – this has been the mantra of gamers for decades. But while the intention of that mantra is a good one, we know it's not altogether true. Graphics have a huge impact on our gaming experiences, with the capability of transforming a good game into a great one.

Witness PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, a masterfully designed RPG that, when combined with superb art direction, becomes one of the best RPGs we've ever played. The artists of Black Isle Studios took the philosophy of the PLANESCAPE universe and gave it life in pixels. The visual theme of the game – the perfection of geometric forms laid over with the chaos of a hellish, decaying world – is consistent throughout. The result is one of the most affecting visual environments ever created for a computer game.

Art matters. And this year, the Black Isle artists mattered the most.



HELL'S GEOMETERS The art of PLANESCAPE was an ode to the dynamic tension between order and decay.



★ Best Playgrounds of the Year ★

Bullfrog Productions Ltd.

As seemingly disparate as DUNGEON KEEPER 2 and SIM THEME PARK may appear to be, we loved them for the same reason – never has so much *life* been packed into a computer monitor. DK2's self-torturing Mistresses and flatulent, chicken-gobbling Bile Demons; the hallucinogenic carnivals teeming with misbehaving kids lining up to race around in a giant rat-mobile – these were the tremendously entertaining and wholly original sights and sounds Bullfrog so richly, rewardingly, brought to life for gamers this year.

2000 HALL of SHAME

Where there is sunshine, there is shadow. For every good, a bad. With so many good games released this year, the necessity of balance in the universe required that there be a pack of stinkers. Here are some of the uglier moments in gaming this year.

Coaster Of The Year

Nocturne

(Gathering of Developers)

Forsaking gameplay at the expense of technological achievement, designer Terminal Reality utterly squandered its promising pulp-horror premise as it pinched off this steaming load of werewolf crap: tedious cutscenes where characters literally stood around, controls that actively hampered play; camera angles that squarely focused on the asses of NPCs instead of the action; painfully bad voice-acting; Artificial Imbecility in lieu of Artificial Intelligence; ludicrously-high system requirements; and some of the most maddening god-awful key-hunting garbage to ever masquerade as *play*. Man alive, every moment playing this game physically hurt.

Playing NOCTURNE was about as enjoyable as gargling fish hooks. And that, friends, makes it the Coaster Of The Year.

Worst Game Concept

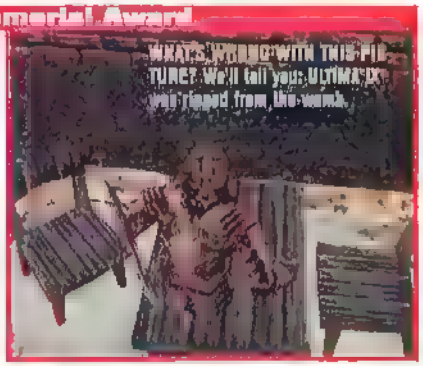
SKYDIVE. 'Nuf said.

Truth In Advertising Awards

It's nice to see marketing folks with a sense of integrity in the gaming industry. Three cheers to the people who accurately entitled DOOM and ABOMINATION. And to Sierra, who provided a warning label on the front of PROFESSIONAL BULL RIDER:

"The longest 8 seconds of your life."

The Outpost Memorial Award



OUTPOST: a game that will live in infamy. A game with so much promise, with such big dreams, all of which was wasted because the game was released too soon – incomplete, buggy, unplayable. This year's OUTPOST memorial reward goes to...ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION! Origin just *had* to ship it by Christmas. And now they'll *have* to live with the fact that they topped off the longest running and most beloved gaming universe with a great big sloppy turd.

"Licensed to Kill" Award

Acclaim killed Kenny!

How long will TV, book, and movie licenses have to suffer mistreatment from misguided game publishers? This year's victims included *Braveheart*, clumsily manhandled by Eidos; and *South Park*, which was butchered in not one, but *three* games. Ah, well. Blame Canada.

The Game We Thought Would Suck The Most, But Actually Sucked The Least

We try not to judge a game by its cover, but the box of Simon & Schusters' MINDGYM, which featured a Woody Allen look-alike in nothing but his tighty-whities, was so repulsive that it sat on our shelves for weeks because we couldn't bear to touch it. But once a *CGW* editor (out of a nagging sense of duty to gamer-kind) finally installed the game, we found a lot to like – particularly the Monty-Pythonesque sense of humor that enlivens this inventive collection of brain benders. Check it out, if you can bear the humiliation of being seen holding the box.

Might and Magic

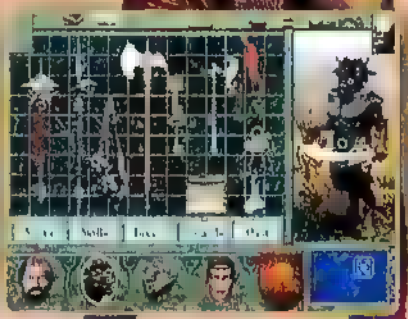
Day of the Destroyer

9 New character classes and races

26 new skills, spells, and special abilities

New lands of heroic fantasy and adventure

Good. Evil. The choice is yours.



In the four corners of Jadame, gates to the planes of Fire, Air, Earth and Water have opened and denizens of those realms are sweeping across the lands, devastating all in their path. You must lead a band of rugged adventurers on a perilous mission to save the kingdoms from ruin.

www.mightandmagic.com

NEW WORLD COMPUTING

3DO

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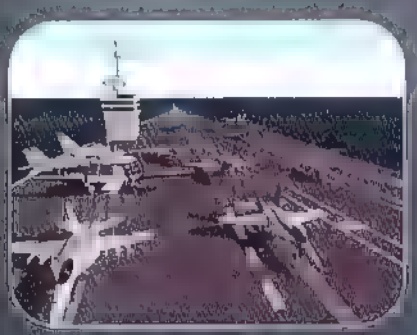
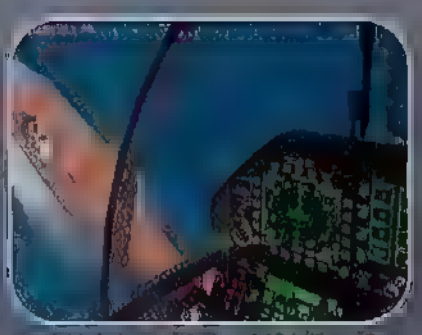


INTENSE CARRIER OPERATIONS PUT YOU RIGHT ON DECK
From steam catapult takeoffs to catching the 3-wire on a rocking, sea-rolling ship, you'll experience every aspect of carrier-based flight operations.

GREAT TAKING GRAPHICS PUT YOU IN THE SCENE
Full weather effects and all-new terrain rendering even shows glints of sun off your 3D cockpit as you fly over the North Sea and Northern Russia.



ULTRA-REALISTIC 3D COCKPIT PUTS YOU IN CONTROL
The fully interactive cockpit gives you point-and-click use, and a panoramic canopy view for the most heart-pounding sensation of flying ever.

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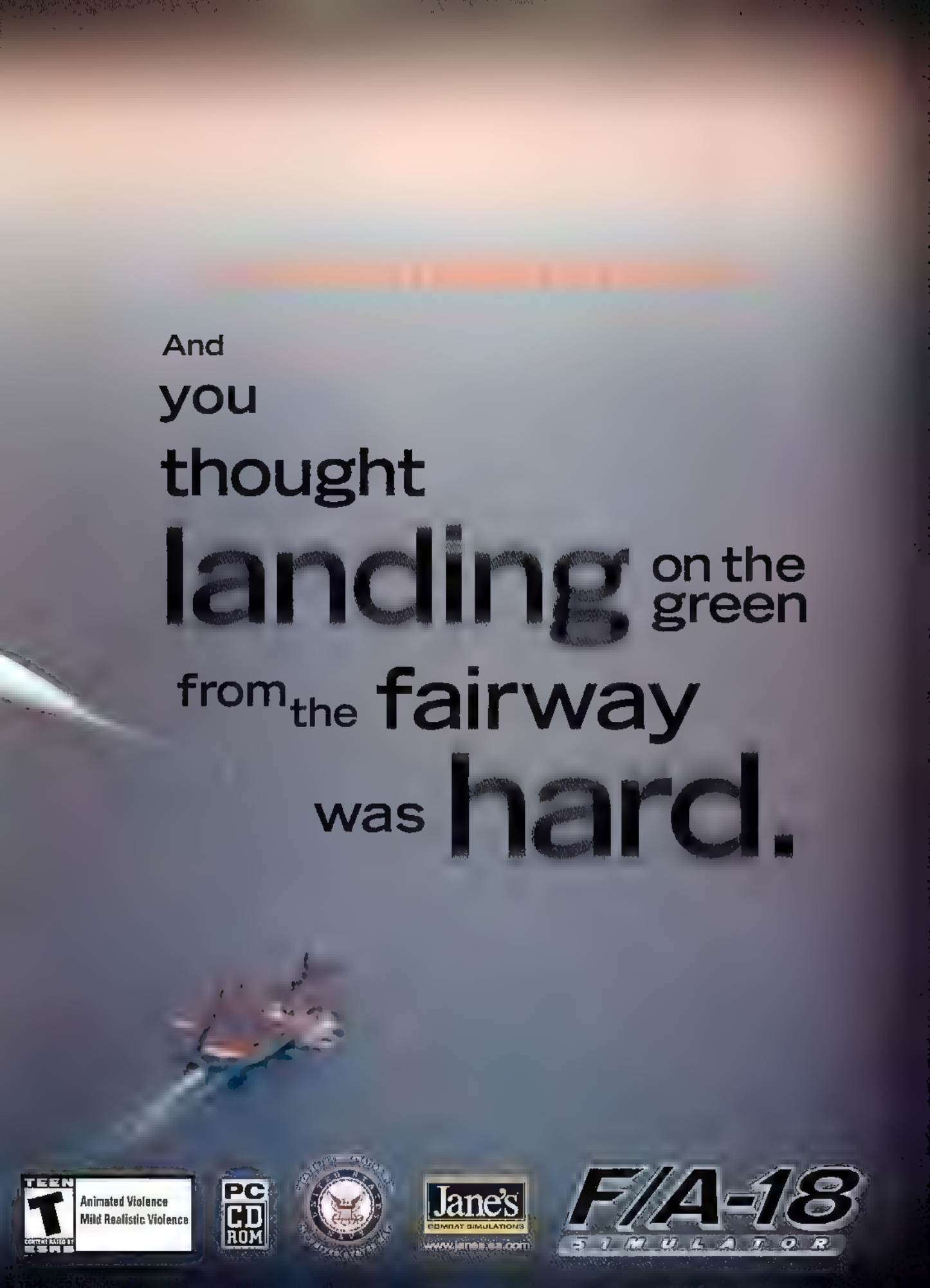

And
you
thought
landing on the green
from the fairway
was hard.
TEEN
T
Animated Violence
Mild Realistic Violence
PC
CD
ROM
Jane's
COMBAT SIMULATIONS
F/A-18
SIMULATOR

MESSIAH

EXORCISE YOUR RIGHT OF POSSESSION

How does a pudgy Messiah with only a diaper for defense find out the source of evil on earth?

Possession... Naked and defenseless, Bob uses his only weapon and takes possession of the first character he sees, a worker.

Bob, recognizable by the halo, realizes that the worker does not have security access to leave the room. So to cause a commotion, "Bob" lowers a 5-ton tank on unsuspecting worker.

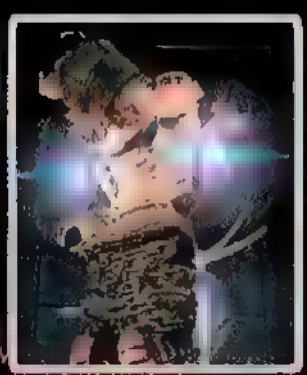
Then he can possess the medic sent in to aid the crushed worker, medics have security access.

Now through a warehouse door, Bob still needs access to the lab where he believes he'll find some answers.

Dumping the medics body, Bob realizes that Cops have access to the lab.

Cops also have laser sighted GUNS! How heavenly!

While being scanned at the door Bob attracts some unwanted attention.



The huge 15 foot genetically engineered Behemoth rips the cop's heart out and like a rag doll tosses his lifeless body across the room.

After seeing the awesome power displayed by the behemoth, who needs a cop, Bob takes possession of the Behemoth and is ready to KICK SOME ASS!

www.messiah.com

END OF THE WORLD PROMOTION

The end of the millennium is upon us. The two thousandth year after Christ. Who better to celebrate it with than "Bob", God's favorite cherub? Where is the biggest new years celebration every year? New York City, Times Square. Shiny, Interplay and Messiah want to send one lucky winner, and friend, to the biggest party on Earth. Witness, first hand, the apocalypse. If it is the end, you might as well be partying when it happens!

Visit www.messiah.com/contest.htm to register for your chance to win! Or send a self addressed stamped envelope to:
Messiah: End of the World Sweepstakes, P. O. Box 38
Ojai, California 93024-0036.

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"Making of Messiah Kit"
BY MAIL. SEE BOX FOR DETAILS.

"The only thing that people will be talking about next year is how nothing compares to Messiah." - GAME PRO

"What will revolutionize the gaming world... is Messiah's unique style and more than a little disturbing gameplay."
- PC ACCELERATOR

"It's this act (possession) of not just taking on a body, but an actual character that makes the game so unique."
- CORE MAGAZINE

MESSIAH

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Sound goods.

If you're searching for the best possible 3D audio experience, you can spend a lot of time listening to the claims of imitators. Or you can get the ultimate experience with A3D on a Vortex card from Aureal, the folks who invented 3D audio for the PC.

The Vortex SQ1500 delivers award-winning A3D on two or four speaker systems, or on headphones, and is the ideal choice for gamers on a budget.

The Vortex SQ2500 provides A3D 2.0 positional audio with geometry-based Aureal Wavetracing, also on two our four speaker systems, and is the ultimate PC audio experience.

Aureal has always provided the best 3D audio technology for the industry, and now we can offer you our own sound cards, built from the ground-up by Aureal engineers. Get the goods that sound good...sound cards from Aureal.

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MARCH REVIEWS

We expected a flood of email in response to our X-men star ratings (issue #186), figuring some Gambit fan club would want to have words with us. But we got a grand total of zero responses. Zip, zilch, nada, bubkis. What's with you people anyway? Can your ire no longer be raised by some opinionated ignoramus game editor with a bully pulpit and some whack attitudes towards pop culture? Do you no longer wish to debate the merits of Doritos Cool Ranch vs Ruffles K.C. Masterpiece BBQ? C'mon folks, let us know what a bunch of stupid jerks we are for giving Herbie the Love Bug only one star by dropping us a line at cgwletters@zd.com.

CGW EDITORS' CHOICE GAMES IN RED

GAME	RATING	PAGE
12 O'Clock High	3	144
Abomination	2	128
Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge	4	117
Jane's F/A-18	4.5	100
King of Dragon Pass	2.5	126
NASCAR Legends	3.5	133
NASCAR Racing 3	4	132
Nations: WWII Fighter Command	1	145
NHL Championship 2000	3	145
Odium	2	138
Omikron	2	143
Planescape: Torment	5	98
Pro Pinball: Fantastic Journey	4.5	144
Quake III Arena	3.5	110
Rayman 2	3	141
Septerra Core	3	130
SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle	4	118
Tanktics	2.5	145
Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation	4	122
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire	2.5	144

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"...just enough of the occasional random rant from your host, evil wind-up toy Regis Philbin, to capture that special, fifth circle of Hell ambiance peculiar to 'The Reeg.'"

-Robert Coffey, reviewing WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE

Planescape: Torment

Nations: WWII Fighter Command

HOW DO WE RATE?

We Review Only Finished Games—No Betas, No Patches

Outstanding The rare game that gets it all right. A must-play experience.

TACO BELL

Very Good Worthy of your time and money, but there are drawbacks.

BURGER KING

Average Either an ambitious design with major flaws, or just vanilla.

JACK IN THE BOX

Weak Seriously lacking in play value, poorly conceived, or just another clone

Abysmal The rare game that gets it all wrong. Pathetic. Coaster material.

Arby's

SPOTLIGHT REVIEW PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

YOU GOT ME UNDER A SPELL Spell effects are amazing, drawing from either well-animated in-game effects, or pulling away to movies that portray their raw power.

PLANESCAPE Is a Game To Die for, Again and Again

Immortal Beloved

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

The nature of death, the true essence of things, the value of suffering, the balance of the cosmic order...wait, is this *Computer Gaming World* or *Philosophy Today*? While most computer games are comfortable following the archetypal "valiant hero sallies forth and slays Evil Foozle Supreme" style, Interplay's newest role-playing game, PLANESCAPE: TORMENT, dares you to question your own beliefs. Half game, half mytho-poetic meditation, PLANESCAPE is a role-playing game without peer.

Hell Is a Frame of Mind

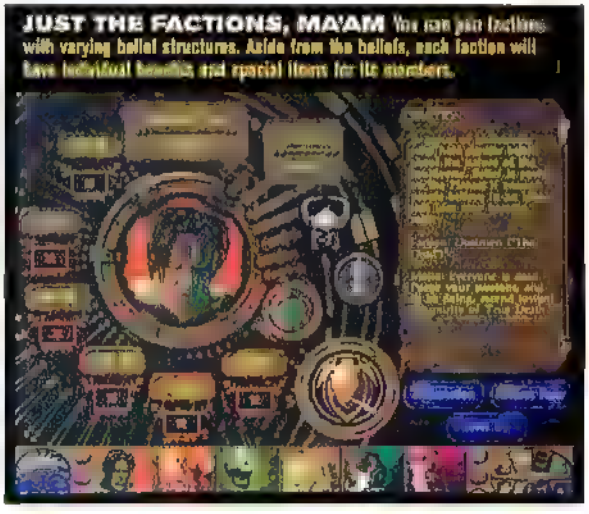
Don't make the mistake of equating PLANESCAPE with elves and faeries just because the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* logo is on the box. While the many rules and conventions of *AD&D* are present, PLANESCAPE is as far from traditional *AD&D* as you can get. The easiest way to describe the setting is to ask Salvador Dali to paint an interpretation of Buddha's words. Imagine Sigil (the city in which most of the game takes place) as an inter-dimensional crossroads of the imagination, a place where reality takes on the shape of one's beliefs, and every bounded space is a potential portal to another frame of mind – whether it be Hell, Heaven, Limbo, or Wisconsin. Into this weird and wild world you are dropped, nameless and without memory.

The Planes are depicted with the BALDUR'S GATE Infinity engine, so combat is real-time with the option of pausing, and the screen resolution stays fixed at 640x480. It is different from BALDUR'S GATE in that the view is full-screen and the perspective is closer to the ground, making both the characters and locales larger and more detailed. The interface is significantly streamlined: many commands are now either context-sensitive, or selected by a menu activated with the right mouse button. Some people may not like the additional streamlining over BALDUR'S GATE; I got used to it.

This Builds Character, Really

Unlike other *AD&D* games, you begin by creating a totally new hero. Character generation consists of tweaking the stats of The Nameless One – and he is ultimately defined by your actions. Alignment, traditionally something you pre-select and use as a guide for your in-game behavior, is now determined by your behavior in the world. You start as True Neutral, and depending on how much lying, vowing, killing, or altruistic action you exhibit, you will move between the various alignments.

This is only one example of the "shaped by action, not by creation" design that PLANESCAPE allows. Most quests and conversations present different options based upon your character's statistics. Intelligence affects both the information gleaned from conversation



JUST THE FACTIONS, MA'AM You can join factions with varying belief structures. Aside from the beliefs, each faction will have individual benefits and special items for its members.

reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

CGW RATED

PROS
Beautifully written story; masterful art direction; true role-playing; solid design; spot-on voices and music.

CONS
Minor technical glitches; becomes fairly linear near the end; text-heavy.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 650MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz, 64MB RAM, 800MB hard drive space.
3D Support: None **Multiplayer Support:** None

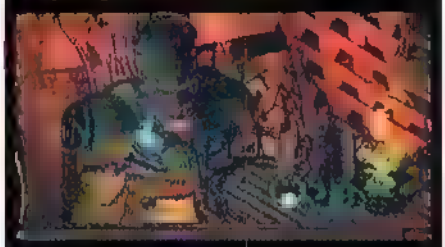
Publisher: Interplay • **Developer:** Black Isle Studios • **$50** • www.interplay.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen (13+); animated blood and violence, suggestive themes.

and puzzle-solving options; charisma determines how well you lie; dexterity determines whether you're fast enough to grab someone; and strength determines whether you can snap your victim's neck. This results in some of the most effective role playing possible without other humans. Every single dialogue and quest has multiple solutions based on your abilities. Combat is only absolutely necessary a few times. I talked/brained my way through three-quarters of the game the first time I played it.

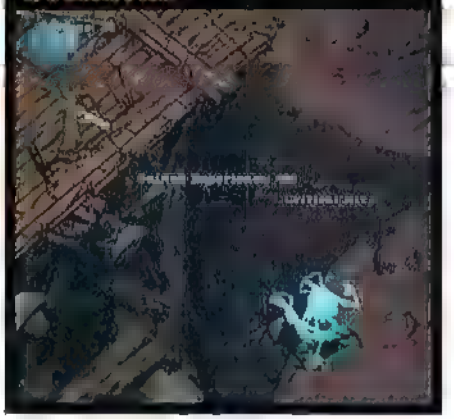
As far as class goes, you start the game as a level-three fighter, and from then on, you can opt to be a fighter, thief, or mage. All you need is a trainer willing to switch your profession, and you're free to switch from clubbing people with your own hand to weaving spells like Celestial Host. All experience points you gain apply only to your current class, so you should pick one class in which to specialize rather than attempt to equalize them all simultaneously (unless you like the idea of trying to finish as level five in all three rather than as a level-22 mage). The game does seem heavily scripted toward mages, however, as they get the most impressive spells and have better defensive items.

TIME TO PARTY Your journal does a good job of tracking quests and giving info on the imaginative NPCs you can recruit.

HO HO HO, JOLLY GRAY GIANT Sigil is so surreal, you can find yourself talking to a giant golem created by Entropy in order to create weapons against the forces of Order.



CRITICAL SUCCESS *AD&D* effects like critical hits are illustrated with animations appropriate to your character, like Nordom's gear. Note that since the focus is closer, there's not as much ranged combat as in *BALDUR'S GATE*.



Death Takes a Holiday

The most clever design element – in a game rife with brilliant design elements – is the handling of death. Guess what? You're immortal. Except for a few extraordinary circumstances, death is no longer a reason to reload a game. Every time you "die" you will wake up in a designated area, with all inventory and experience intact. Death is the central theme in the game, in fact, you *must* die in order to trigger memories that advance the plot and to solve certain puzzles. The fact of your immortality presents some situations that you've never seen in a game before, such as having someone open you up and search your intestines for hidden goodies, or biting your own finger off and replacing it with another.

The design team seemed to have looked at every major annoyance of past RPGs, and either fixed or satirized them. For example, quests are still inherently FedEx runs, but their staging and execution makes up for it – such as a ticking time bomb type of quest, which finds you trying to return a box to a series of people who don't want it. Rats, the most mundane of RPG creatures, suddenly become deadly when a group of them uses its Hive-mind to cast brutal spells on you. Mazes, the universal torture device of gamers, are parodied in a sequence where Higher Beings create a maze complete with identical-looking rooms, random loot, and Foozles to research "the appeal that mazes hold for adventurers."

PLANESCAPE's best feature is its terrific writing. Be warned, this is a text heavy game (circa 800,000 words), so be prepared to slow down, take your time, and read. The team took Cliched Plot Device #1 – waking up with amnesia – and weaved an extremely dark and mature story that mixes in elements of myths/classics like *The Ramayana* and *Paradise Lost*. Conversations never insult your intelligence; oftentimes

Making the Most Out of Life?

PLANESCAPE contains a number of plot-critical moments found only in optional quests. Here's a checklist of nifty things you don't want to miss, but might if you're not thorough. WARNING: there be PLOT SPOILERS below.

▲ Before going to the Fortress of Regrets, make sure to retrieve the Bronze Sphere. Once inside, you will get a chance to talk to some people, and learn what the Spheres truly is. This is probably the most important revelation in the entire game.

▲ If you recruit Fall-From-Grace, be sure to talk to her about Morte; then talk with Morte afterwards, to learn his full story. Dolonaera isn't the only person-from-a-previous-life in the Mortuary. If you have a severed arm from a previous life, go to Fall's Tattoo Parlor, and ask Dak'kon to translate your conversation about the tattoos on that arm. Once you learn Dak'kon's story, search the first floor of the Mortuary to find this new person.

▲ Be sure to buy a Modron Toy at the Curiosity Shop. Toy with it until you get into Rubikon Maze, and find Nordom. He is one of the funniest and most powerful NPCs you can recruit. For the other NPC, be sure to walk past the portal before leaving Curst.

LIVING IN A VAN DOWN BY THE RIVER You can improve your other party members by either discussing philosophical precepts, or by simply motivating them.

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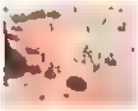
MORE GAMES FOR LESS

The Hottest Pre-Orders

Diablo II
"Explore the world of Diablo II, journey across distant lands, fight new villains, discover new treasures and uncover ancient mysteries."

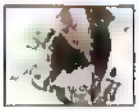
Oni
"Lara Croft may have opened the door for the third-person-perspective action game, but Konoko, Oni's heroine, could lead the charge."

Giants
"Giants is a 3D real-time strategy game that takes place on planet consisting of 30 separate islands."



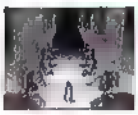
Dark Reign 2
"Dark Reign 2 will introduce new strategic elements, incredible graphics, new RTS enhancements and spectacular multiplayer gameplay."

Vampire: The Masquerade
"Based on the popular tabletop role playing game, the PC version of Vampire: The Masquerade offers fans of the series a true translation."

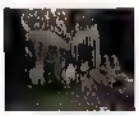


Business Tycoon
"...a fast and furious world of simulated stock trading... sharpen your skills, sell and trade shares without investing your capital or livelihood."

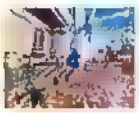
Trans Am Racing '68-72
"Muscle is back . . . the most realistic racing simulation ever created, with the most exciting cars ever produced."



Die Hard Trilogy 2
"Try to beat the odds as you match wits with the meanest, smartest villains in the most explosive adventure John McClane has ever faced."



KISS: Psycho Circus
"This upcoming title from Gathering of Developers inspired by the KISS legacy, conceived by the imagination of Todd McFarlane."



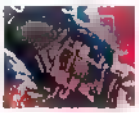
Heavy Metal F.A.K.K. 2
"Heavy Metal F.A.K.K.2 will blow your mind with its immersive storyline and special FX."

The Sims
"From Will Wright, the creator of SimCity, comes a new strategy game that hits close to home. It's up to you to decide...their fate is in your hands."

Tribes Extreme
"Join the thousands of tribal warriors who have discovered the REAL challenge of squad-based competition."

Amen
"Begin the most dangerous adventure of Bishop Six's life, as he slowly uncovers the horrible truth behind this strange affliction..."

Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms
"If you're ready for the challenge of true team-based online action, you'll find it in Team Fortress™ 2: Brotherhood of Arms."



Metal Fatigue
"If you're a real-time strategy gamer and this news only gets you vaguely interested in Metal Fatigue, there IS something wrong with you."

Triple Play 2001
"EA Sports' award-winning Triple Play Baseball.™ series is back for another big season."

Command & Conquer: Firestorm
"Kane is Dead and a new enemy has emerged. You've played the biggest game of 1999, it's time to experience more."

Duke Nukem Forever
"Duke fans, sign on up, this game is amazing."

Test Drive Cycles
"Put on your leather and helmet (where the law requires), and get ready for the ultimate cycle challenge."

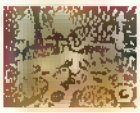
Test Drive Le Mans
"The ultimate driving challenge. And if you feel like staying up all night, there's a 24-hour challenge packed in."

Nash Point
"Promises to combine several genres into one—for people who like a mix of intense firefights and brain-challenging tactics."

Mission Impossible
"Mission Impossible will give you a good ride the first time you play it, even though you might start pulling your hair out when you're stuck."

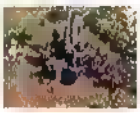
B17 Flying Fortress
"The B17 Flying Fortress, alongside the legendary Avro Lancaster, was the ultimate bomber in WWII."

Hired Guns
"A futuristic, first-person 3D shooter set in a slick, neon-washed cyberpunk world."



MDK 2
"Visually the game is quite stunning; the lighting and shadow effects are the most impressive features."

Final Fantasy VIII
"Amazing plot and character development; great cinematics, good battle engine."



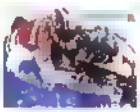
Majesty
"MajestyTM is a unique sim putting you in the crushed velvet hotseat of your own kingdom.."

Soldier of Fortune
"Plunge into the secret and deadly world of the modern day gun-for-hire in Soldier of Fortune."

Gun Ship
"This is one of the most immersive games about modern combat in years."

Werewolf: The Apocalypse
"A seamless blend of action, adventure, and role playing boasting more thoughtful plots and characters."

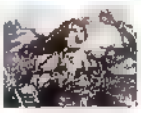
Star Trek New Worlds
"It's time to leave the vastness of space behind and play out your destiny in the biggest land battle."



GP 500
"A fantastic, first-person 500cc motorcycle racing experience that sets the standard in simulation and fun."

Deep Fighter
"...an epic tale of action, strategy, exploration and conquest set in the depths of the ocean."

Evolva
"Combine equal parts genetic engineering, third-person action and overhead strategic/tactical gameplay, and this is what you get."



[illegible]
"Character balance is well-done, what is even better are the spell traps and combinations."

Soulbringer
"Soulbringer is a new 3D classic fantasy Adventure RPG in the true sense of the words."

$10 Off your order of $30 or more
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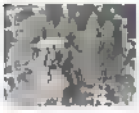
MORE GAMES FOR LESS

The Coolest Recent Releases

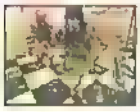
Quake III Arena
"No one is safe. Hardwired action is yours for the taking in single-player and multiplayer battles."

Unreal Tournament
"A single-player extravaganza and a multiplayer tour de force. If you're looking for 'the next big thing' in computer gaming, stop your search."

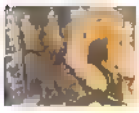


Asheron's Call
"A stunningly beautiful epic role-playing game that draws you and thousands of other players into a dynamic, 3D online world."

Tomb Raider Last Revelation
"Follow Lara back to Egypt where she returns to her roots, both in game-play and story line."



Half-Life Opposing Force
"Opposing Force has more twists and turns than the lines to see *Phantom Menace* and more horrifying moments than a high school dance."



Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine
"Infernal Machine is gorgeous, seemingly well-paced, and filled with interesting foes."

Septerra Core
"Those who enjoyed Final Fantasy VII or Return to Krondor should look out for Septerra Core."

Freespace 2
"The best traditional space sim to come along in some time isn't from LucasArts or Origin. It's the sequel to the well-done Freespace."

Messiah
"It was foretold that the messiah would return after 2000 years. Apparently, he caught an earlier flight."

Sim Themepark
"The Theme park is back in town and the kids are clamoring at the gates. The only thing is you haven't built it yet."

You Got The Descriptions...
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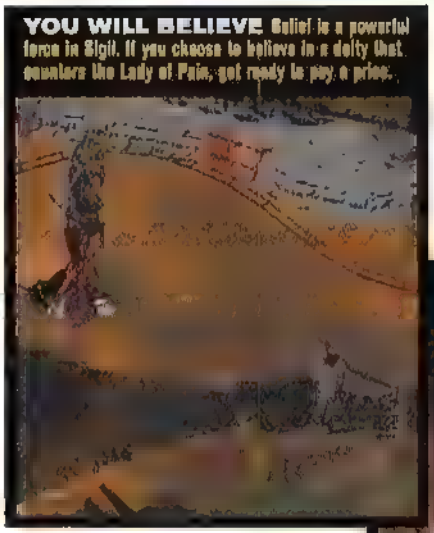
MORE GAMES FOR LESS

EYES IN THE BACK OF MY HEAD Your inventory is imaginative. Instead of traditional armor, you can choose to equip different tattoos or even some new eyes you pick up here and there.

TRUTH OR DARE Quest resolution and your moral alignment depend on what you choose to say and do, and how much truth-telling/swearing/lying you engage in.

they mushroom into heavy philosophical debates on topics such as existence, doubt, entropy, or the will to live. The ethical dilemmas presented surpass even those of the mighty ULTIMA IV, the 15-year-old standard for ethics-based character development. The writing can get heart-wrenching at times – such as the incredible guilt I felt when I freed Morte, the floating skull side-kick, tell about his past, or the vulnerability felt in reliving someone's dying moments. Alas, sometimes the game's best moments are written in excellent prose rather than portrayed on-screen, leaving a lot to the gamer's imagination.



YOU WILL BELIEVE Belief is a powerful force in Sigil. If you choose to believe in a deity that counters the Lady of Pain, get ready to pay a price.

Problems in Paradise

There are just a few problems with this game. A few bugs will cause some quests to remain unsolvable when certain actions are taken; armor class can get screwy after spellcasting, auto-pausing doesn't always work correctly; and a memory leak can severely slow things down. Some gamers might get annoyed at the gradual linearity of the story, and others will be miffed that there are so many courier quests.

Finally, a personal annoyance of mine is that certain elements of the rich story are completely optional. You can go through the game doing only the necessary work and get a great story, but if you take the extra time, you'll get an amazing story. I sometimes wished that certain story elements were part of the main quest rather than side quests. Yet, it's a testament to the game that despite all of these annoyances, it still kept me up nights and consumed the majority of my gaming time, even after finishing it twice with two radically different characters.

TELL ME A STORY PLANESCAPE has a great sense of humor, as illustrated in this exchange.

HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE You can travel to Hell and talk to a giant tower that is composed of the heads of liars and scholars. Hmm, another game this original.

There are certain, rare games that have become *experiences* for me, such as the raw, visceral DOOM and the majestic CIVILIZATION II. I'm completely surprised by how quickly PLANESCAPE has become one of these experiences as well. Most of this is based on design and story content – never mind the beautiful art or the atmospheric sound and music.

PLANESCAPE is simply the best RPG since FALLOUT, and for gamers who don't mind putting up with minor annoyances, a tome of text, and the possibility of questioning your own values, it's time to see what being immortal is all about. CGW

1602 A.D.

A New World

DISCOVER

Set sail across vast oceans to discover new islands and worlds filled with varying terrain and resources.

COLONIZE

Claim an uncharted island as your own. Then, establish your settlements, use resources, and begin to build a new country in your name.

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Begin with a simple settlement of farms and fishing villages. Establish industries, develop an economy and grow your population to turn your early settlements into thriving towns and cities.

TRADE

Establish treaties and trade routes with other islands and colonies. Good relationships will guarantee your success.

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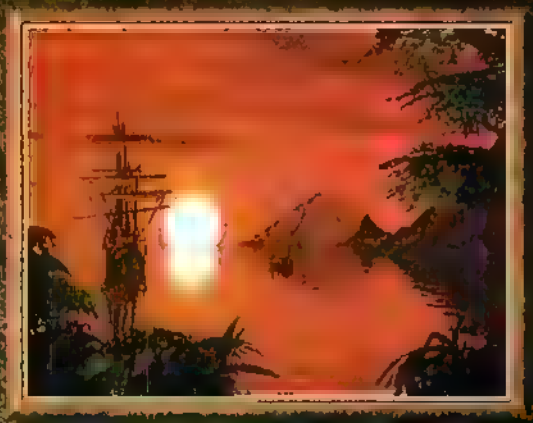

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- Discover over 700 unique islands with varying landscapes
- Over 50 building types. Over 30 unique trades
- Single player mode offers a choice of seven campaigns, continuous play or more than 40 scenarios with pre-set missions
- 3 tutorial games guarantee a quick and easy entry into gameplay
- Real time land and sea battles
- Lavish 3D animation replace functions filled by statistics in other games
- Dynamic artificial intelligence automatically adjusts to player's skill level
- Cinematic transitions between scenarios
- Multiplayer mode for up to 4 people per network or 2 players via modem and includes over 30 unique multiplayer scenarios
- Map editor lets you create your own new world to build and rule

CONQUER

Use battle ships and troops to keep your settlements safe and trade routes free from hostile enemies.
Or, wage war against your enemies.

PC CD-ROM

Jane's F/A-18 Delivers Its Payload on Target

One Super Hornet Sim

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

Jane's latest hardcore simulation, featuring the U.S. Navy's brand-new F/A-18E Super Hornet, carries on the fine tradition established by the LONGBOW series and F-15E flight sims. As with its predecessors, F/A-18 combines an authentic flight environment and highly-detailed avionics modeling to create a superb sense of flight.

Most gamers reserve reading a game's manual as a final act of desperation. Indeed, the quality (or lack thereof) of many game manuals may well have trained their readers to behave this way. F/A-18's manual, however, is a welcome exception to the norm. Although it appears a little small, weighing in at 200 pages, it is absolutely packed with information, especially regarding avionics. The serious military-aviation fan will want to read every page; it includes as much unclassified information on avionics, electronic warfare, and target recognition as I have seen in a single source, let alone a game manual. And there are some real gems of information that aren't usually available to the public.

PUNCH OUT A MiG-21 pilot has some time to contemplate the concept of air superiority.

The Big Picture

F/A-18 features numerous other improvements over previous Jane's titles. Compared to F-15E, F/A-18 contains roughly twice as many campaign videos and 50 percent more digitized speech, with some 39 voice actors.

You'll find the usual variety of gameplay modes: instant action, narrated training missions, single missions, and campaign play (including multiplayer campaigns). Training debriefings are particularly interesting, providing "did you know?" tidbits about each mission. The campaign engine uses the usual method of reasonably random missions, interlinked to form an overall war. While not truly dynamic, mission elements provide some level of replayability. The mission editor, of course, allows players to create missions to their hearts' content.

Under the Microscope

The flight model may well be the most heavily scrutinized, heavily criticized aspect of any flight sim. For a $40 computer game, F/A-18 holds up remarkably well when compared to real-world flight parameters. The real F/A-18 is an outstanding fighter, but bleeds speed rather fast. Sim jocks, thanks to the flight-control system, can hold the stick fully aft all day without departing. Doing so, however, will bleed the speed and leave the simulated jet an easy, wallowing target. The flight-control system is no replacement for old fashioned energy management skills. At the same time, the E model's larger engines (delivering 30 percent more thrust than previous models) can accelerate the jet rather quickly. It's very easy to overshoot a slow enemy or to come in too fast to land on the carrier.

As the manual indicates, available G-load varies based on weight and flight profile. The jet has a tendency to pitch up at transonic speeds, which is normally corrected by the flight-control system. Still, available G-load drops below 6g at transonic speed to prevent accidental overload.

The avionics suite introduces many features never seen before in a flight sim. For example, F/A-18 takes non-cooperative target recognition (NCTR) a step beyond FALCON 4.0, providing more details about operation and usage. F/A-18 features decoys, which saved more than one Hornet in operations Desert Storm and Allied Force (and probably account for more than a few bogus enemy-kill claims).

The weapons model breaks new ground as well. The AIM-120 AMRAAM (medium-range missile) goes beyond the one in FALCON 4 by providing a "LOST" cue when it is unlikely to hit its target. The AGM-88 HARM (anti-radar missile) also has advanced modeling, allowing multiple modes of operation. Besides targeting and attacking an emitting site, the missile may also be fired at pre-set coordinates or even fired "blindly" ahead, where it will search for and engage emitters.

For those who want to experience Navy-style probe-and-drogue aerial refueling, F/A-18 will show you why it requires a steady hand. After making a correction, allow the plane to settle on its new course before yanking the stick around more. This prevents over-controlling (don't forget: Wiggle your toes!).

Call the Ball

As we can rightfully expect, F/A-18 features the absolute best aircraft carrier environment found in a sim. The carrier moves forward, pitching and rolling with the waves. This effect is particularly noticeable when waiting for a cat launch during bad weather, as the horizon appears to rise and fall. Reliable ATC calls will get the player airborne and back on the deck, although I found the "radio stack" (which causes multiple calls on multiple channels to continually step on each other) annoying, even if realistic.

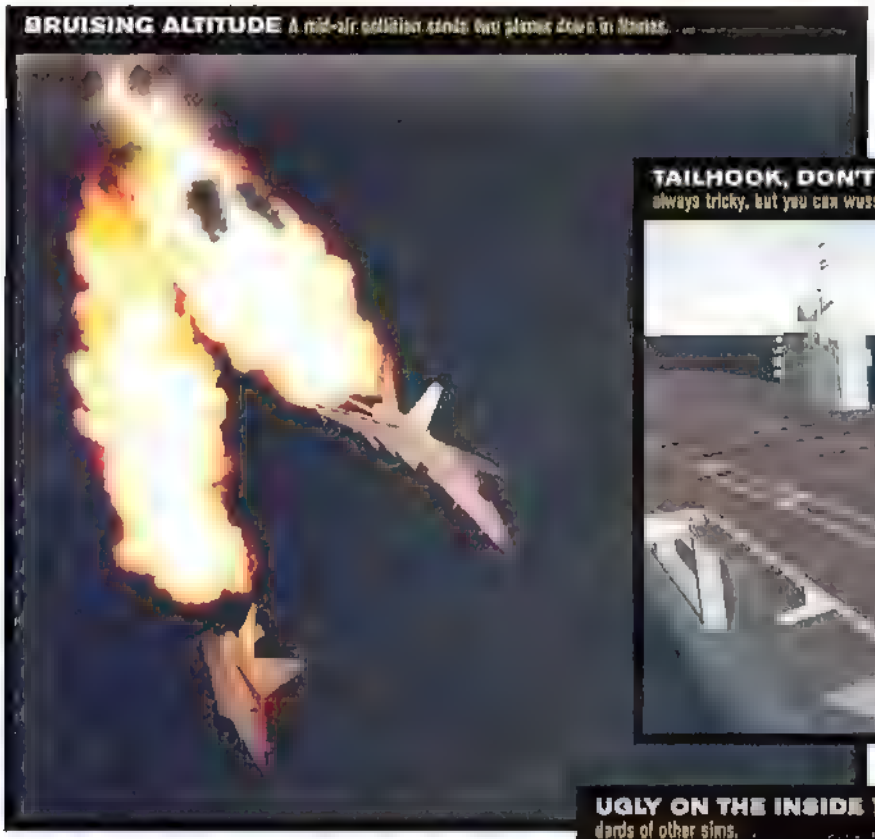
CGW RATED

PROS
Solid flight model; highly detailed avionics; well-modeled carrier ops.

CONS
Cockpit graphics are a bit blocky; frame rate suffers with rendering features dialed up.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz or higher, 64MB RAM, Direct3D graphic accelerator, 6X CD-ROM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 350MHz or higher, 64MB RAM, 16MB Direct3D graphic accelerator card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP

Publisher: Electronic Arts • **Developer:** Jane's Combat Simulations • $40 • www.janes.ea.com • ESRB Rating: Teen

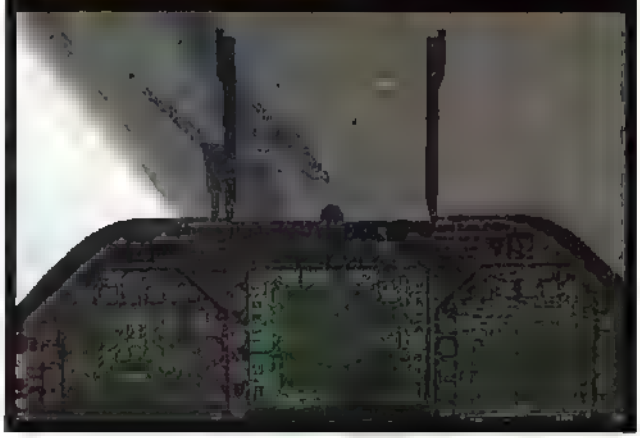


BRUISING ALTITUDE A mid-air collision sends two planes down in flames.

TAILHOOK, DON'T FAIL ME NOW Carrier traps are always tricky, but you can wuss out with the automatic landing feature.

UGLY ON THE INSIDE The cockpit graphics aren't up to the standards of other sims.

KILLING BY THE NUMBERS The air-to-air master-mode quickly selects air-to-air weapons and radar.



Particularly interesting is the treatment of the carrier's "meatball" lens system. Located along the left edge of the deck, the meatball helps the pilot line up during the final seconds of a carrier trap. The limited resolution of computer monitors, however, makes realistic placement of the meatball on the deck very difficult to see until after one has already landed. Jane's broke with this less-than-useful tradition, placing a meatball "window" over a non-critical part of the instrument panel. When the pilot "calls the ball" during approach (indicating he has visual contact), the meatball appears over a central control panel. Although technically unrealistic, the feature offers a much more realistic landing experience by providing a fully usable meatball. It's a worthwhile tradeoff to let you experience what a real pilot experiences, rather than to see what he sees.

Sometimes combat provides enough white-knuckle trauma for the player, and the thought of repeated bolters during a bad-weather night landing isn't appealing. Consequently, F/A-18 also simulates the real world Automatic Carrier Landing System (ACLS) which brings the jet back aboard the ship "hands free."

Any Downside?

Perhaps F/A-18's weakest category is the cockpit graphics. While featuring higher resolution than JANE'S F-15, the cockpit is rather blocky compared with sims like FALCON 4.0. But the terrain looks reasonable and features some great weather and shading effects. Most importantly, the opponent's wings are clearly visible at dogfight ranges. Damage effects during combat, especially burning planes falling from the sky, are rendered quite well. Long, streaming smoke trails from missiles and wounded planes highlight the sky. Graphics detail, though, has always devoured CPU cycles, and F/A-18 is no exception. If you want maximum graphics detail, be prepared to sacrifice frame rate (and vice versa).

In the end, F/A-18 is a truly remarkable game, and clearly an evolutionary step in the Jane's line. This title gives an excellent glimpse at the workload of an F/A-18 pilot, and provides a very authentic – as well as entertaining – flight experience. CGW

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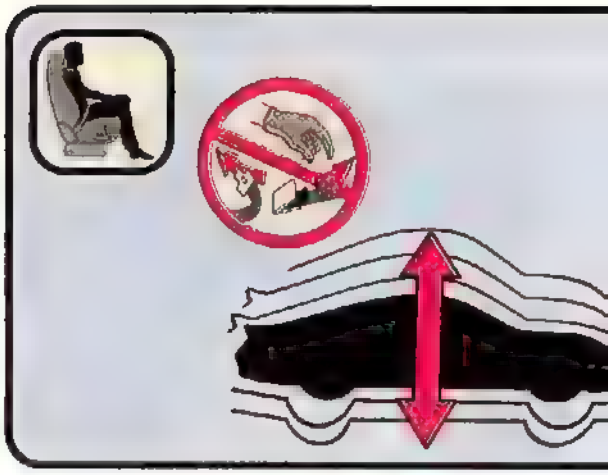
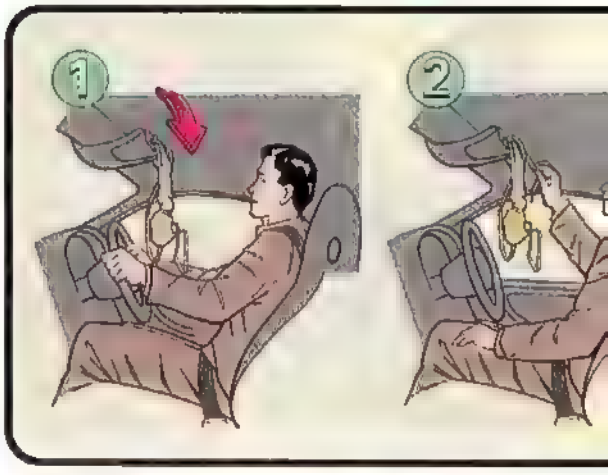
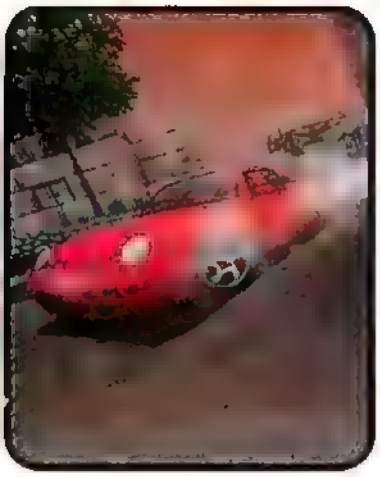
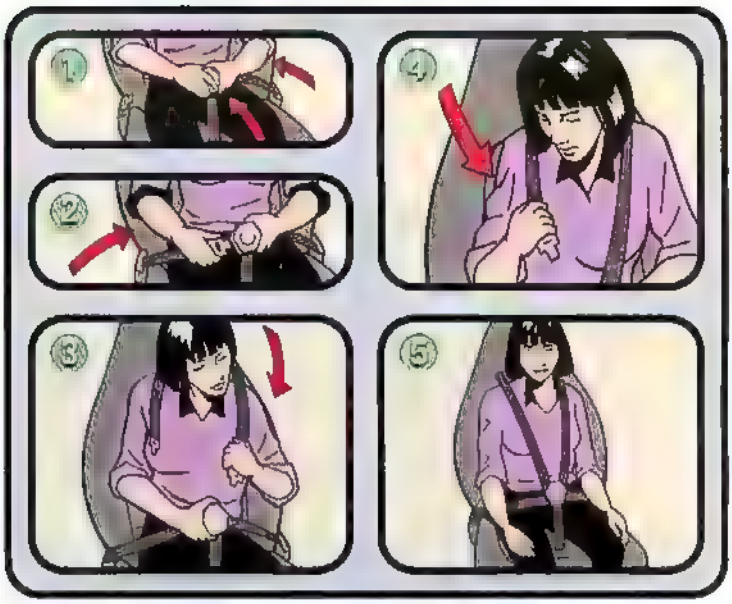
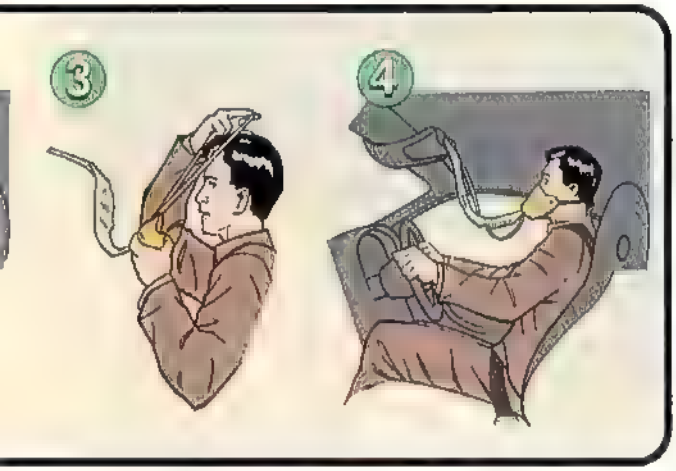
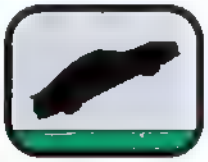


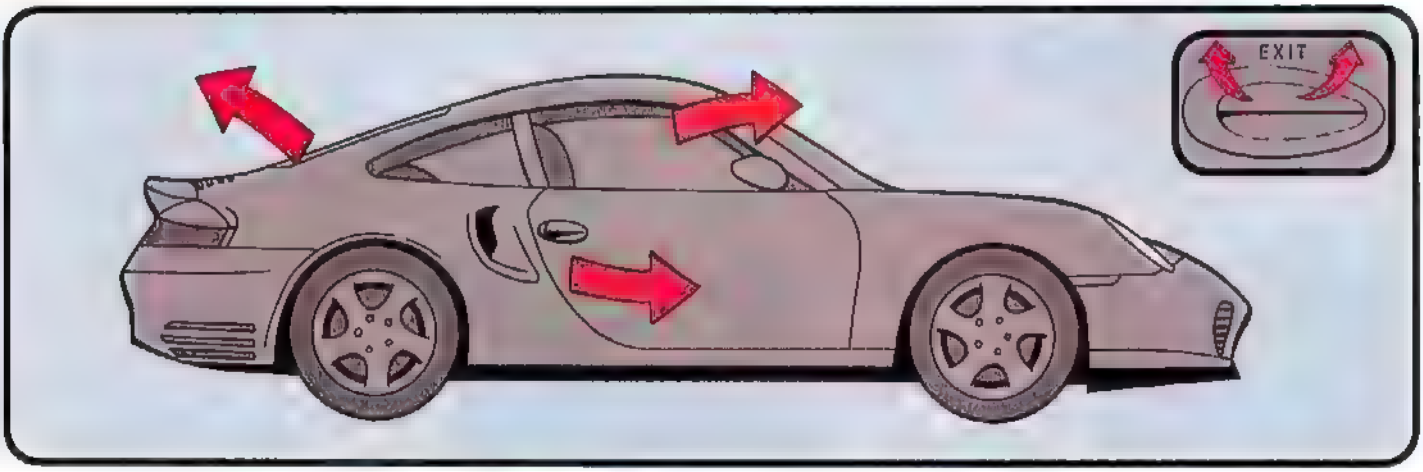


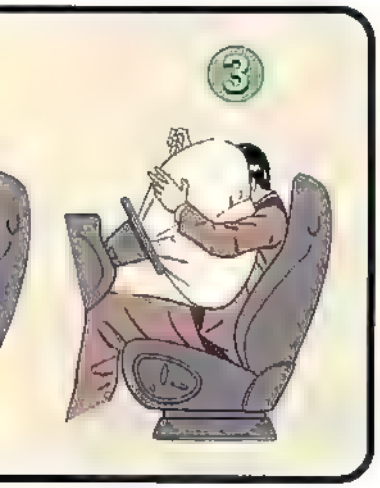












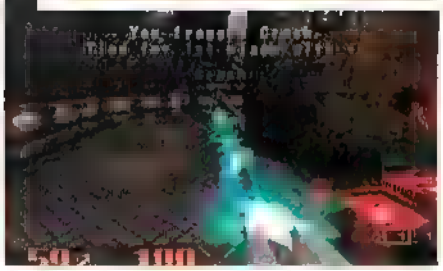
EXIT OPERATION:
OBSERVE SURROUNDINGS. IF SCENERY IS MOVING-REMAIN IN VEHICLE. IF STATIONARY, PROCEED WITH CAUTION TO NEAREST EXIT.

QUAKE III ARENA Is Good Pure Deathmatch, but That's It

Barely A Tremor

ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPION Tournament mode adds those with olympic medal-style vignettes to the end of each match.

ZEUS' FURY The lightning gun makes a less-than-triumphant return. It can frag fine, as soon here, but there's no water discharge this time.



QUAKE III ARENA

Reviewed by Thierry Nguyen

I confess: DOOM nearly killed my Computer Graphics course grade. While WOLFENSTEIN 3D was a great at-home diversion, DOOM sucked up my lab time during class. When I should have been creating Bezier curves and fiddling with *CorelDraw*, I was either thumping Imps or watching a classmate's little marine clutch his throat in agony before crumpling onto the floor. When I joined *CGW*, I joined a House Of QUAKE. It ended our days, it soothed our nerves; it sometimes delayed the magazine. I thought the proud House Of QUAKE would still stand with the release of QUAKE III ARENA (Q3A), but alas, it fell.

Engines of Destruction

Before I get to The Fall, let me say this: Nobody – and I mean nobody – can code engines like John Carmack. Q3A proves that. Netcode-wise, Q3A is very solid; though the few times it stumbles, it falls flat on its face. A couple times, I've had timeouts on the office T1, and while it's very playable on my piddly 56K connection at home, that pesky network socket flashes on my screen a lot more often than wanted. It's not as perfect as, say, QUAKE II's or even QUAKEWORLD's network code, but I'm sure it'll be tightened up. Out of the box, it's still very reliable.

Utilized properly, Q3A has some of the best graphics in any action game. Techheads will note the heavy use of curved surfaces and volumetric fog, while visualists will appreciate their excellent use within levels. Alas, while these elements help make the levels look beautiful, id has yet to grow out of an extremely limited color palette. They've merely added red and purple to their now-familiar collection of browns and grays.

While the limited color palette makes the levels a bit drab, their design is geared entirely towards gameplay. The levels are generally divided up into themes; some are gothic arenas, others are twisted hybrids of organic and metallic form, and the last few are free-floating space platforms. There are hardly any "hot damn, that's pretty" feats of architecture in Q3A; all the walls and ceilings and arches are built from a deathmatch gameplay perspective. Paths are laid down in such a way that maps are easy to navigate, yet they aren't bone-numbingly simplistic. Every level is laid out to give the perfect balance between finding someone else quickly and having the time and space to gather your items. Many items and secrets have multiple methods of reaching them (i.e., doors or pads or rocket-jumping) in order to prevent the "only one way to get there" syndrome. Some levels emphasize close, tight combat (the one-on-one tourney maps) while others (any of the tier-six maps) have wide-open areas perfect for spraying indiscriminate fire. All in all, id is still untouched when it comes to designing pure deathmatch levels.

TRIANGLE MAN In team-based games, your friends are the fellas with the triangles above their heads; note the informative team-tracker in the corner.

Boys and Their Guns

Traditionally, most DM modes in other games have had a limited variety of characters to play; they were all basically different colors

CGW RATED

PROS
Beautiful graphics; solid network code; wide variety of player models; great deathmatch maps; has the "purity" and feel of old-school id Deathmatch.

CONS
Uneven AI; limited color palette; barely passable interface; lackluster single-player is pretty much deathmatch-or-bust out-of-the-box.

Requirements: Pentium 233 MHz, 64MB RAM, 25MB hard disk space, OpenGL-supporting 3D card, mouse. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 300 MHz, 64MB RAM, 500MB hard disk space, fast Internet connection. **3D Support:** OpenGL **Multiplayer Support:** LAN, Internet (2-32 players). CD needed only for single-player or game-creation.

Publisher: Activision • **Developer:** id software • $50 • www.quake3arena.com
ESRB Rating: Mature; animated blood, gore, and violence.

The *Real* Deathmatch

QUAKE III Arena vs. UNREAL TOURNAMENT

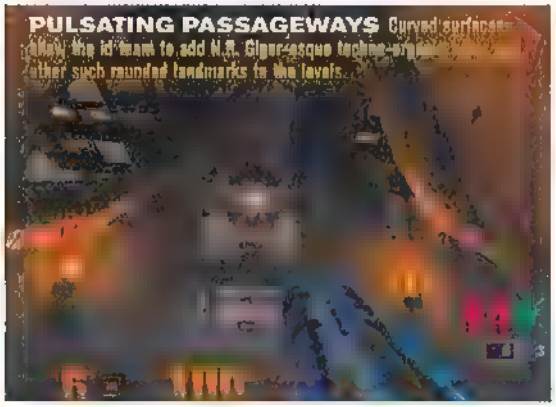
For the record, we at *CGW* like UT better, hands down. UT simply has more: more gameplay thanks to the various play modes; more interesting levels that seem more like environments, rather than just maps some guy made; way more colors; and more simple mods out-of-the-box. While UT's bot AI is imperfect, it doesn't outright cheat as much as Q3A's, and it also handles teamwork much better. Sure, Q3A will undoubtedly be the subject of many user-designed mods that will expand its playability, but UT already has a solid foundation out-of-the-box for future user-designed mods to stand on. Considering the variety, the gameplay, the AI, the polish, the overall sense of character, and the way the game is just so intoxicatingly fun – we have to give the nod to UT. The CGW House Of Quake has been toppled.

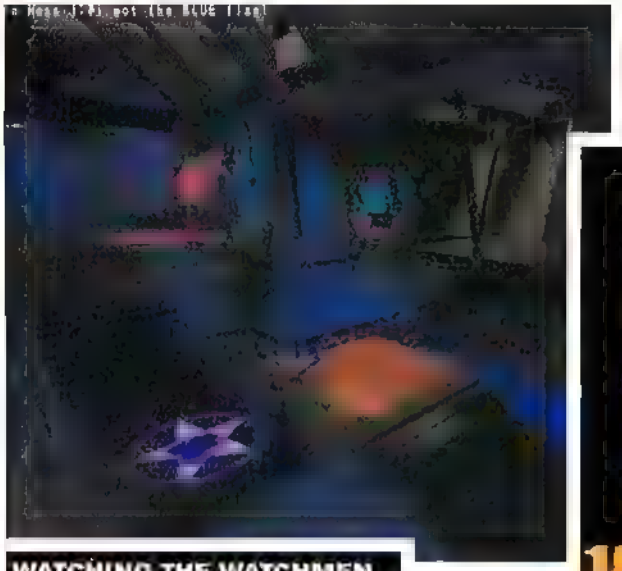
and outfits on the same model. Q3A ups that by providing 30 different players, most of which are entirely new models. Some models are there for nostalgia's sake – such as the DOOM Marine named, well, Doom, or the QUAKE Marine called Ranger. Others are wholly new creations, such as Orbb the giant-eye-with-legs, or Uriel the wingless gargoyle. It's a refreshing change to be able to play as something other than a male human, female human, ugly human, or humanoid robot. Not surprisingly in this steroid-packed game, the majority of the female models tend to look like supermodels packing enormous.. um...guns.

About those guns: Q3A's weapons exhibit extreme More-Of-The-Same syndrome. You've seen all of these weapons before, and with the exception of the BFG, they've been only slightly tweaked. The rocket launcher is still the dominant weapon; the shotgun still has two barrels and thumps people up close; the plasma gun fires the same blue balls of death; and the railgun is still the sniper's choice. Sadly, the lightning gun no longer discharges pure death in the water like it did in QUAKE, and the BFG went from blasting an all-consuming deathball to a rapid-fire quad-rocket rifle (id wanted a bit more skill to be used in BFGing people). Sure, they're well-balanced – man alive, they *should* be after having been used in four games.

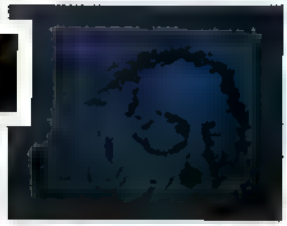
(Very) Artificial Intelligence

One of the big marketing points for Q3A is the bot play, but bots are a hit-or-miss affair, with more misses than hits. On the default set-





WATCHING THE WATCHMEN Before joining any big game, you can always scope out the territory as a spectator.

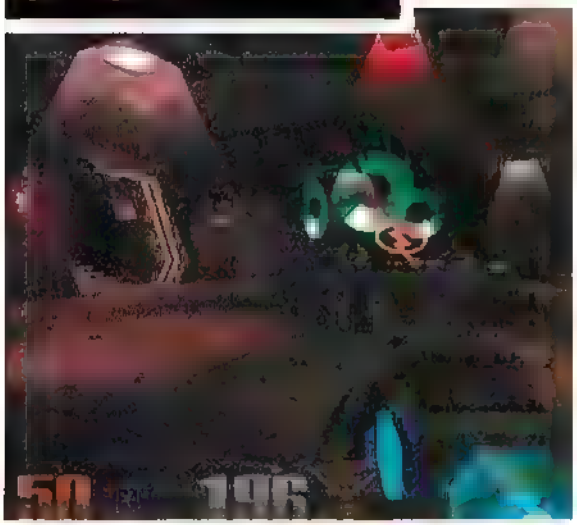


OLD MAN MURRAY Leave it to id to place little references to, or, icons of the online community.

BFG? BFD! The BFG is basically a super-beefy rifle now, so you'll need to actually aim it this time in order to reduce your opponents to a cloud of pulp.

DO AS I SAY Intermingling online sessions either using this menu, typing in the commands, or editing .cfg files to bind commands to keys. None of these options is as effective as UNREAL TOURNAMENT's command interface.

MAKE HASTE Q3A's list of power-ups include Haste (pictured), Quad Damage, BattleSuit, Flight, and Regeneration.

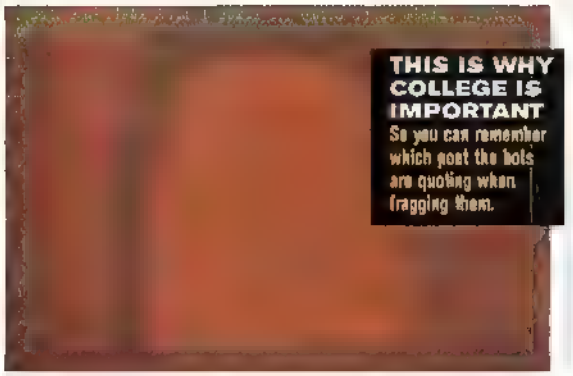


ting (Bring It On), they're complete pushovers; playing on I Can Win is akin to playing with one-armed monkeys. Crank up the AI a bit, and they start getting better. They don't follow strict patterns, and in fact, they almost have personalities (some bots prefer being railgun snipers, while others have different levels of aggression/cowardice). Their personalities extend to the goofy text messages they often type to each other. These range from pure trashtalk to compliments to utterly bizarre comments (while it's funny to see Bones quote a Dickinson poem, it reinforces the fact that it's a bot – since I've never seen a player who'd type in an excerpt of a 19th century American poet). They even have full conversations with each other (and you, if you type something to them), which sometimes has the side effect of making the game feel so surreal. I half-expected some giant smiling tiger-elephant from a Dali painting to suddenly swim by and tip its hat at me.

It would be nice if id had stopped there, but alas, on the higher levels, the bots cheat – plain and simple. On difficulty modes such as Nightmare, bots are merely decent players with godlike aim; Xaero ably navigates a level and picks up good loot, but when he fires, *he never misses*. How else can one explain him hitting me on the other side of a map as soon as I respawn? Or how one hit from his shotgun while I had full health and armor kills me, while he can take two, maybe three hits with the same conditions? Good players sometimes fall into patterns that may take a long time to detect, but they rarely have precise-enough aim to hit a rapidly-moving target weaving through the air – in one shot with a railgun – *while flying through the air themselves*. In Q3A, cheaters *always* prosper, and it sucks.

Singularity Failure

In addition to skirmishes with the bots, Q3A has a tournament mode. What this means is that the 26 deathmatch levels have been divided up into tiers, each tier having three normal deathmatches, and ending with a one-on-one tourney map. Within each tier is a fixed number of bots, with the best bot of that tier being the opponent for the final tourney. On the default setting, I finished this in four hours. Pump up the bot AI, and that became, well, about six-to-eight hours. Yawn. You don't even



get a tangible award or marker for completing it; you just get a goofy cinematic. With the combination of a simply decent skirmish mode and a mediocre tournament, don't be looking for a fulfilling single-player experience. CTF is tacked on as an afterthought; it's nice, but having just four maps out of the box – even if they are by the Godfather of CTF Dave "Zoid" Kirsch – just isn't enough.

Also, there is quite an unfriendly interface to power the game. While the maps and the bots are there to assist newbies, the interface sure as hell isn't. The browser barely passes muster; it's a hassle to refresh, sort, or add servers to favorite lists. It's so barebones that GameSpy or PingTool is pretty much required to find a good server. When setting it up, you have to make a .cfg file that will cycle through the maps, which is pretty weird in an age where every other game has a simple "rotate map" button on their interfaces. Finally, giving orders in CTF requires one to either type them out, or to press Escape and use some arcane menu system. Granted, most of the Q3A audience are hardcore deathmatchers, but why make the claim of "helping to ease newbies in" with such a lacking interface?

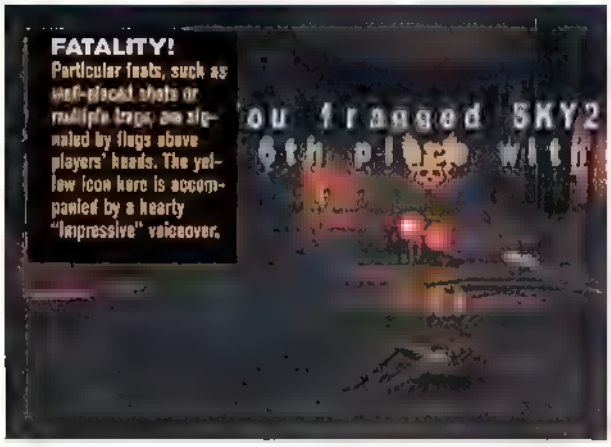
It's extremely difficult to slap a rating on Q3A, especially in light of UNREAL TOURNAMENT. On one hand, id ended up with what it set out to make: a solid, pure deathmatch game. But in light of UT, that doesn't seem to be enough; I just want more. I know that deathmatch purists are already eating this game up, and if you crave incredibly fast deathmatch in the realm of DOOM or QUAKE, then Q3A is your game. Those of you who want a bit more depth – and a decent single player mode – should either pass, or buy this title and wait for the online community to make mods for you. CGW

Cool Links

www.gamespy.com is here to spare yourself from the cumbersome server browser.

www.blueshews.com/quake3 The never-sleeping Blue maintains a good central-resource area for Q3A players everywhere.

www.planetquake.com A good resource for news, mods, and levels.



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CLOSE COMBAT IV Tautly Reenacts the Battle of the Bulge

Mayhem in Miniature

Fifty-five years after the actual battle, CLOSE COMBAT: BATTLE OF THE BULGE takes gamers back to the desperate, hand-to-hand fighting in the latter stages of World War II. Like its three predecessors, BATTLE OF THE BULGE gives you an eye in the sky, far enough away to monitor the battle, yet close enough to hear your men shooting, shouting, and dying.

CLOSE COMBAT: BATTLE OF THE BULGE adds a number of new features to the award-winning, real-time, tactical combat system that have a dramatic impact on play. For starters, the game incorporates an all-new strategic layer that lets you plot the movement of battle groups and monitor the location of the front lines throughout the course of the campaign. This is an important advancement for the series, because it gives players a better sense of the battlefield and where they can best employ their assets. Second, the designers have finally added air-to-ground support to the system – something critics have been clamoring for since the release of the first game – and they've even managed to include off-map artillery fire and parachute drops. These are certainly long-overdue improvements, and they help put the game on an entirely different level from its earlier chapters.

CLOSE COMBAT: BATTLE OF THE BULGE

Reviewed by Marc Dultz

NICE BULGE The new strategic layer gives players a better sense of their overall objectives and how each battle fits within the grand scheme.

Familiar Terrain

BATTLE OF THE BULGE is not without its problems, however. While playing the Grand Campaign, I noticed that my German assault groups were fighting for the same piece of ground again and again, even though I had gained a Total Victory earlier in the campaign. To make matters worse, I was oftentimes commanding the same forces I had led earlier, and in some instances, I was fighting with units that had been destroyed in earlier engagements.

I also found the computer opponent and strategic layer to be a bit troubling. At the tactical level, the computer-controlled American forces would often launch feeble counter-attacks along narrow avenues of attack when they had absolutely no hope of achieving success. In fact, on several occasions my units were able to flank the enemy's axis of advance, smash their assault, and gain a Total Victory while remaining on the defensive – all without the loss of a single *landser*. Meanwhile, at the strategic level, the computer's forces would put up only token resistance at critical road junctures, especially along the key approach routes to the River Meuse. As a result, I was able to brush past the enemy's defenses, seize my objectives, and advance toward Antwerp well ahead of schedule and without suffering grievous casualties.

So what's my assessment? Well, even though the strategic layer adds a welcome new dimension to the system, and the AI has been tweaked to provide a bit more challenging play, I'm of the opinion that the tactical and strategic layers could have been better integrated to offer a more cohesive plan of action. And while BATTLE OF THE BULGE is certainly an important step forward for the war-gaming community – and, in particular, the CLOSE COMBAT series – it still has several miles to journey before it has indeed reached its final objectives. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Engrossing gameplay; new off-map artillery, air support, and strategic layer.

CONS
Battles sometimes need to be refought unnecessarily; dead units reappear in later scenarios; AI is erratic.

AUF WIEDERSEHEN The [illegible] is easy to draw a bead on enemy units. The green line indicates a clear line of sight; the exploding Sherman heralds another bad day for the Americans.

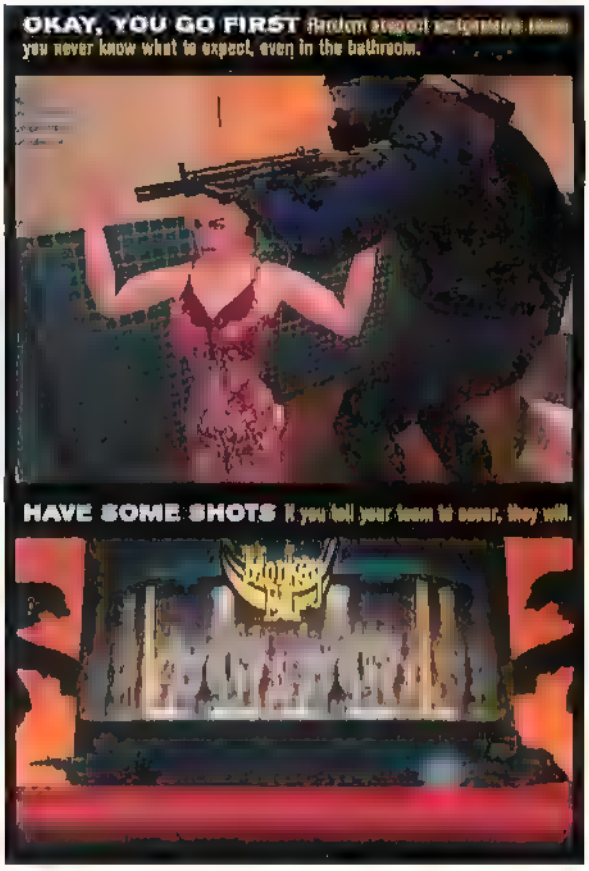
Requirements: Pentium 200MHz or faster, 32MB RAM, 60MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM, 4MB video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II, 64MB RAM, 100MB hard drive space, 24x CD-ROM. **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer Support:** 2-player LAN, modem, Internet, serial, and DOF connections.

Publisher: SSI • **Developer:** Atomic Games • **$45** • **www.ssionline.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

SWAT 3 Bursts Onto the Tactical Combat Scene, Armed to the Teeth

COPS 3.0

Like the heavily-armed precision team it models, SWAT 3 kicks in the door of tactical combat games, bristling with innovation and an all-business attitude. The game introduces several new features such as dynamic orders and communication, randomly-placed suspects and objectives, and uncannily human artificial intelligence. It's the most convincing first-person simulation of close-quarters battle since RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR, and in many respects is more realistic and demanding. In fact, the simulation is so complete, it underscores once again why you never want to be a cop.



Welcome to SWAT, Please Train Yourself

One of the biggest hurdles to enjoying SWAT 3 is teaching yourself how to play it. Without a tutorial and with the sparest of manuals, you are thrown into your first mission without so much as knowing how to open a door. You'll learn the ropes, but the oversight is especially unfortunate considering how some training could have deepened the game's realism.

SWAT3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE

The game unfolds through 16 missions in locations throughout Los Angeles in 2005. As commander of a SWAT team, you'll be called to rescue hostages, escort dignitaries, serve warrants, or "bring order to chaos" in many elaborate and unusual scenarios. The art direction and design of these locations are superb, and the objectives are interesting and varied. More importantly, the scenarios are different every time you play them, because the threats are randomly placed. (The game's producer, Rod Fung, says the team created 500 different starting locations for hostiles. That sounds right, because I've died in at least that many ways.) The random-threat assignment is one of the game's best features and gives it serious replay value, crucial in a game with no multiplayer support.

A story emerges after a few missions about a Russian terrorist group intent on vaporizing downtown LA with a tactical nuke, right before the signing of the Nuclear Abolishment Treaty. The story is interesting, but not as detailed or dramatically enacted as the one in ROGUE SPEAR.

Each mission is preceded by a convincing briefing that lays out the mission objectives. In most cases you'll learn what kind of threat you're facing and who to look out for. The narratives are crisp and well acted, and they do a great job of creating urgency. At the end of the briefing, you select your weapons (Benelli shotgun or silenced MP5 if the suspects don't seem to have body armor, M4 assault rifle if they do) and head out on the hunt.

Watch My Back

Once the mission starts, you're in command. You must instruct your officers as to what to do as you enter buildings and clear them of threats. Rather than take point and try to be a hero as in ROGUE SPEAR, you issue orders to your team from behind them with a menu of commands such as "Enter and Clear" or "Cover for threat." It's a bit awkward at first, but after a while it becomes natural – and essential – for survival.

Rarely do a game's elements synthesize so perfectly as in this one. The detail of your men, the design of the locations, the intelligence of the suspects, and the erratic behavior of hostages all come together to create a chaotic, thoroughly realistic simulation of what you'd

CGW RATED

PROS
Interesting scenarios; challenging AI; random objectives; innovative command design.

CONS
No tutorial; no multiplayer; officers lured to their deaths too easily; stuttering audio.

Requirements: Pentium 233MHz, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 4x CD-ROM drive, 4MB video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 266MHz or better, 64MB RAM, Direct3D-compatible 3D card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Sierra On-Line • **Developer:** Sierra Studios • $50 • www.sierrastudios.com • **ESRB Rating:** Mature

ESTES' BFG With less unusual challenges, like finding and disabling rocket launchers being used to fire on inbound airliners.

expect a SWAT operation to be. When your men encounter threats, they'll yell, "Drop your weapon, moron! Get down on the ground! Do it!" Sometimes the suspects will cooperate, other times they'll start firing and you'll hear, "Officer down! Officer down!" Many times you'll lose half your team if you overlook a door or a terrorist hiding spot. In the heat of the moment, it's easy to shoot a hostage or even a member of your own team because he stepped into your field of fire or you confused him for a terrorist. Thankfully, your own team will never plug you the same way, but if you shoot one of them, watch out.

This illustrates another of SWAT 3's advancements in the tactical-shooter genre: You have to discriminate in your choice of targets. You're a police officer, not a member of an elite military group like

KID AND KIDNAPPER Finding [illegible] right after a [illegible] fight triggers an emotional response unusual for computer games.

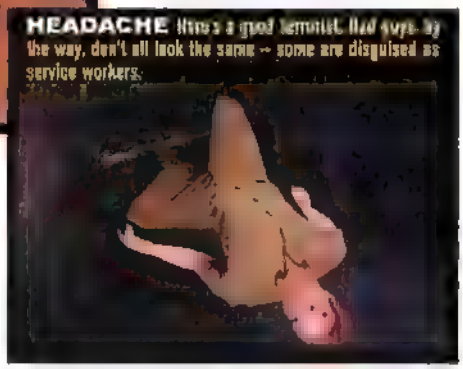
Rainbow or Delta Force, so you have to ensure hostage safety or you'll lose the mission. The game includes a number of tactical aids based on real SWAT equipment to help you. These range from non-lethal shotgun rounds to tear gas, flashbangs, and a very useful remote video camera. All of these make it possible to identify and disable threats without firing a shot. Of course, if you want to execute terrorists in retribution for wounding your officers, you can do that, too. But you have a leadership rating in the campaign based on your effectiveness and the proper use of deadly force. If officers lose respect for you because people are getting injured and killed, they won't be so quick to follow orders.

Flies in the Oinkment

Most of the time, SWAT 3 is a suspenseful, immersive, action-packed simulation that succeeds in what it sets out to do. But there are several things that hold it back, and I don't mean the minimal manual or the lack of multiplayer support. First, I wouldn't expect 10-year SWAT veterans to go plunging off into dangerous locations without cover at the first sign of threat. The officer AI isn't bad, but you'll need to corral your teams and tell them to cover far more often than you should have to. If not, they'll die.

Second, despite the fact that you may be ordered to rescue the president of Russia from a hotel, escort dignitaries at the Convention Center, or disarm a nuke at City Hall, you never have more than a four-man team. Imagine being a SWAT commander facing a barricaded force three times your size – and not being able to call in backup.

In the tedious-but-not-ridiculous category, the necessity of calling in every hostage, suspect, and downed officer bogs down the game with busy work. It would have been nice for fellow officers to be able to assist with calling in trailers.



HEADACHE Here's a good terrorist. Bad guys, by the way, don't all look the same – some are disguised as service workers.

Finally, even though there are only 16 missions, a lot of people will never finish the game either because it's too hard or because the last mission is a maze. With such fascinating scenarios earlier in the game, I was disappointed that the last level is a timed maze with seven devices, randomly located throughout a vast sewer system. If I wanted to feel desperate and under the gun, I'd work for a newspaper.

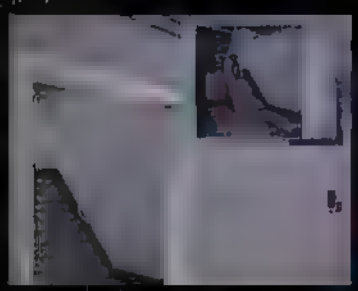
Debrief

Despite these issues, I still recommend SWAT 3 for those interested in a challenging and deep tactical-combat game. It gives ROGUE SPEAR serious competition; but even though they both have strong replayability, I'd give a slight edge to ROGUE SPEAR for its greater sense of drama, additional replay options, multiplayer capability, and just plain fun. CGW

Waving the Magic Opti-Wand

One of the best tactical aids in SWAT 3 is the Opti-Wand, a slender video camera with a 180-degree field of view, mounted on a flexible tube.

The device lets you peer around corners to see who might be lurking there. You can order your Element to use the Opti-Wand and report back what they see, or you can use it yourself. By using the Opti-Wand to "mirror" for threats, tossing in tear gas, and yelling "Police! Come out with your hands up!" most suspects will surrender without a fight.



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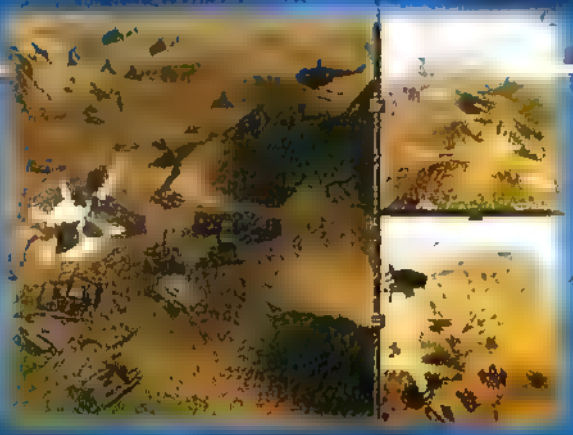

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Lara Croft Returns For Her Last(?), and Perhaps Best, Adventure

Her Roots Are Showing

Love her or loathe her, Lara Croft is back, and for the last time if we can believe Eidos' promise to kick their Lara habit. TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION is the game that fans of the series have been waiting for since the original. Everything that was good about the first game has been revived, and everything wrong with the sequels has been either fixed or minimized, making THE LAST REVELATION as good as the first TOMB RAIDER game – and in many ways even better.

The story this time has something to do with mystical amulets, awakening ancient Egyptian gods, and a mentor-turned-evil-nemesis who looks and sounds a lot like Tot from *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In fact, the first level flashes back to Angkor Wat in 1984, and follows teenybopper Lara and her then-teacher as he trains her in basic maneuvers. It's a rather boring level, and a poor substitute for Lara's mansion, which served the same purpose but contained a lot of secret goodies and was way more fun. The rest of the game takes place entirely in Egypt where you will actually raid tombs, something that the previous sequels had moved away from.

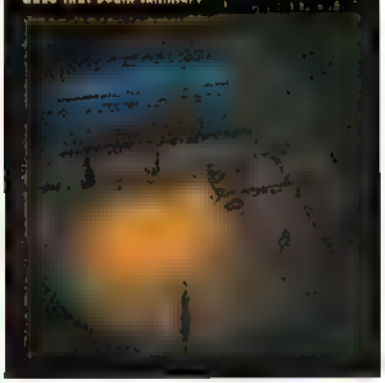
TOMB RAIDER: THE LAST REVELATION

Reviewed by Tom Price

Gameplay hasn't changed in any fundamental way. You're still doing the same running-jumping-climbing-swimming moves, but with a few new additions. Lara can now use poles to climb up and down as well as swing from ropes. The ropes are a nice nod to realism, but are very difficult to use, especially when you have to swing from one rope to the next. Thankfully, the number of box-pushing puzzles has been reduced considerably, and the new variations on switch-pulling (hanging switches, chain switches, upside-down switches, etc.) refresh that terribly-tired element of puzzle solving. On the whole, the puzzles are truly unique and intelligently placed around the levels.

Lara's arsenal has been pumped up to include a scope that fits on several weapons, and several new types of ammunition. The crossbow, for instance, can fire normal bolts in addition to explosive and poison tipped bolts. And when outfitted with the scope, a weapon is fired from a first-person sniping mode.

EYE IN THE SKY With the help of a laser scope, you can use certain weapons (in this case a crossbow) in sniper mode. A sniping crossbow that shoots exploding bolts. Why does that seem familiar?



I HEAR THE TRAIN A COMIN' Level design goes beyond the normal static rooms of past games. If you fall off this moving train level, you'll find out what happens to these genius people lying on the tracks.

I'M LOOKING THROUGH YOU Thanks to some improvements to the graphics engine, Lara becomes transparent when she gets in the way of the player's view.

The game's dated graphics engine may be its biggest weakness, but the serious effort the designers put into making the levels look beautiful and exotic pays off so well that I can't fault them for reusing it. The texture work is some of the best I've ever seen, and the addition of bump-mapping really makes a difference. The level design is quite varied and skillfully done. Believability and atmosphere seem to be the focus over humongous, overly-opulent rooms. The elegance and diversity of the layout in the Lost Library of Alexandria level make it one of the best levels in the series.

It seems that the designers at Core finally listened to all the complaints about the various TOMB RAIDER games and put out a game that finally does the series some justice. They went back to what made the first one good – elegant level design, a continuous sense of discovery, and a mood that strikes a perfect balance between tension and satisfaction.

If you're like me and were enraptured by the first game in the series, but consistently disappointed by the sequels, then THE LAST REVELATION will revive your faith. If you've never played a TOMB RAIDER game, then there's never been a better time to start. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Excellent art direction; good puzzle design; a return to the series' earlier style.

CONS
Tired engine; gets tedious in places.

Requirements: Pentium-II 266MHz, 16MB RAM. Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II 300MHz, 64MB RAM. 3D Support: DirectSD, Glide.
Multiplayer Support: None
Publisher: Eidos • Developer: Core • $45 • www.eidos.com • ESRB Rating: Teen, animated violence and blood.

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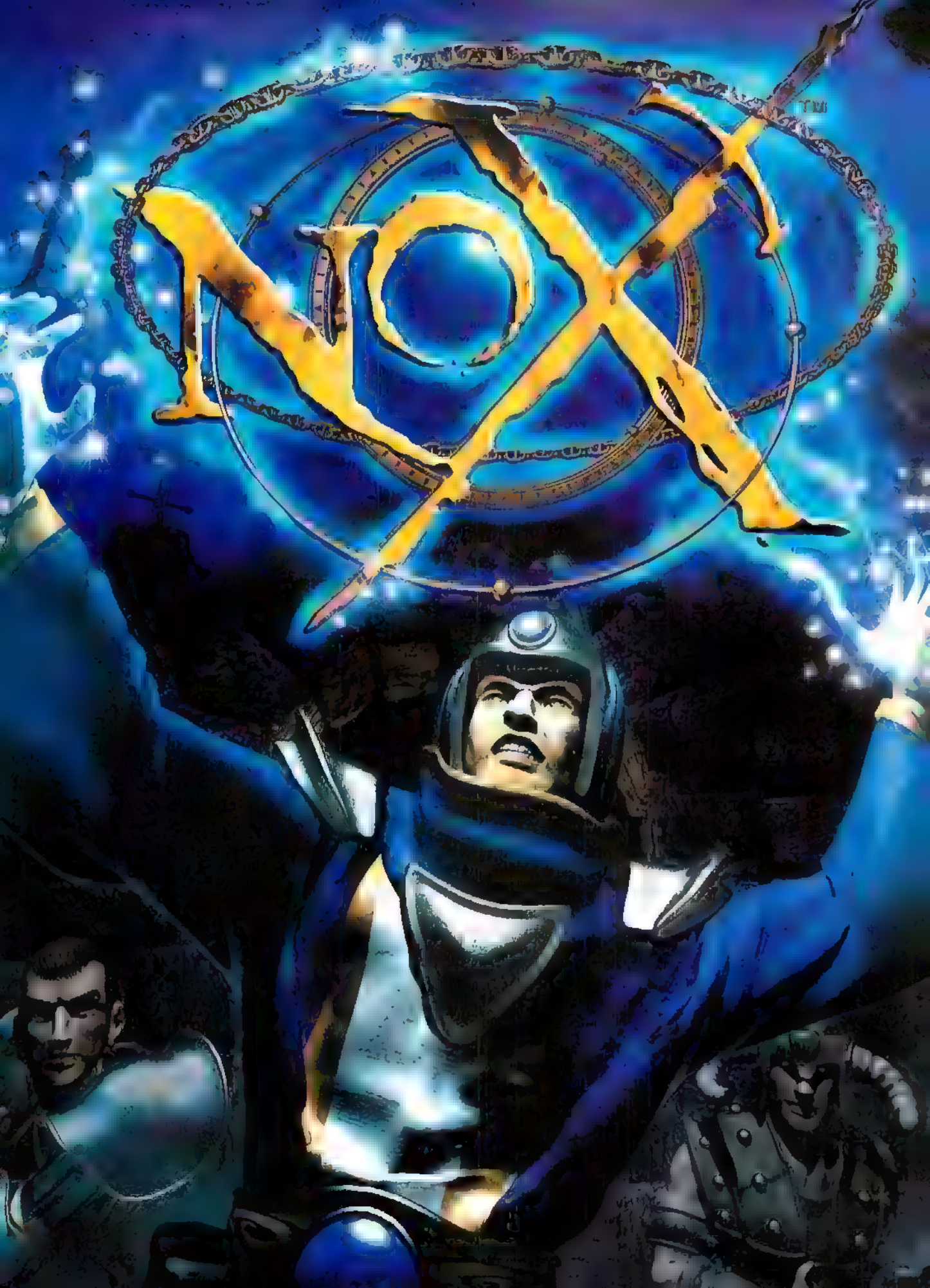

NOX

KING OF DRAGON PASS Plays Like A Book

Reading is Fundamental

Have you read a good game lately? KING OF DRAGON PASS from A Sharp is a turn based fantasy/strategy game that is just a few icons and pretty, hand-drawn screens away from being a text-based game. If ever a game was designed to test the hardcore gamer's creed – namely, that gameplay is all that matters – that game is KING OF DRAGON PASS.

KING OF DRAGON PASS is set in the fictional world of Glorantha. You are charged with leading your barbarian clan, one of many that have resettled in the Dragon Pass area. Your goal is to lead your clan to prosperity and eventually form a tribe by convincing other clans to join with yours. The ultimate goal is to see one of your clan leaders become king.

KING OF DRAGON PASS

Reviewed by Mark Asher

My Kingdom for a Cow!

Throughout, you'll be accosted by raiders from other clans, bandits, shamans, strange creatures like vampires, and more. The coin of the realm is cows. You trade and raid for cows, and only slaughter them for food when you have no other options. You'll also have to juggle resources, and make sure that your people are fed and your weaponthanes (fighting units) are happy and sufficient in number. You'll form alliances with some clans and feud with others. You'll establish trade routes and barter with neighbors. It's the classic decision-making stuff that is at the heart of any good strategy game.

The gameplay is divided into years made up of five seasons. You can take two actions during a season. The actions are grouped under farming, relations with the other clans, trade with other clans, war, council makeup, magic, and exploration. For example, a war action might be to raid another clan, while a magic action might be to sacrifice to one of the gods or to build a temple. Doing both would wind things up for that season.

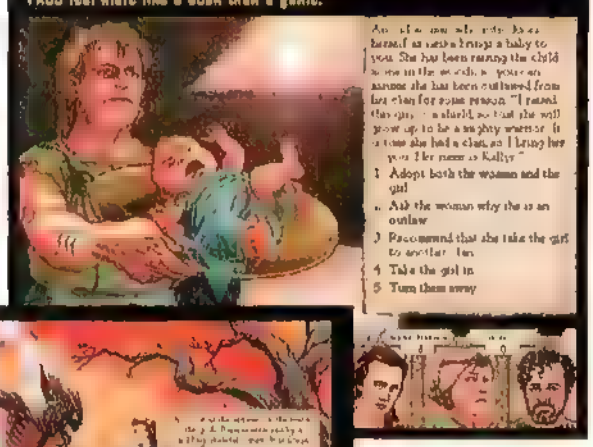
The best part of DRAGON PASS is the believable fictional world. The writing is quite good throughout the game, especially the myths and stories of the gods. These myths are important, as you'll have to recreate some of them in the form of hero quests to gain the favor of a god and win the game. You'll also be treated to fine writing throughout as each member of your Clan Ring, a group of advisors, offers his or her perspective on a problem confronting you.

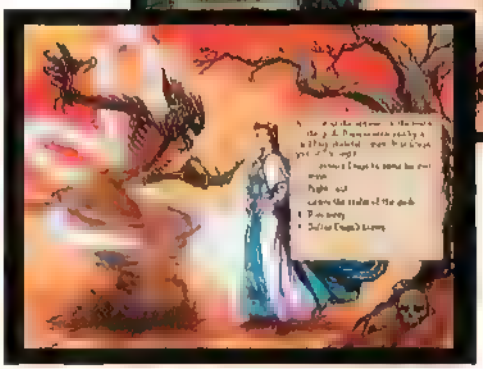
While the strategy game offers a wealth of decisions to make, it can at times feel like a "Choose Your Own Adventure" book that turns the pages for you. An event will occur, such as one of your clan women being caught cavorting with a rival clansman, and you will then be presented with a list of choices. Do you 1) Ignore it, 2) Force the clansman to marry her, 3) Raid the rival clan or...you get the picture. Pick one and hope you chose wisely. Usually, you don't. This game is not easy. I had to restart several times before I succeeded.

Graphically, the game has nice hand drawn screens but absolutely no animation. The setting of a battle is described to you and then you choose to charge, skirmish, etc., and the results are displayed. The overall effect is not very exciting. Too many games compete for our attention, and the visual presentation in DRAGON PASS – while pretty in its static, hand drawn way – is a major drawback.

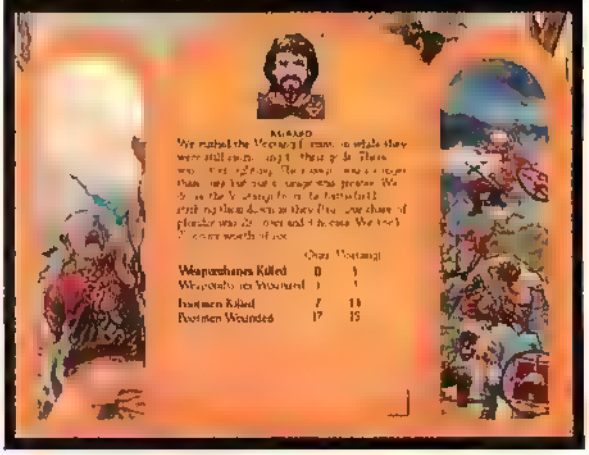
Ultimately, KING OF DRAGON PASS is a game long on atmosphere and strategic choices, but it fails to engage at every other level. Call me shallow, but I want gameplay *and* graphics. And I'll bet you do, too. CGW

CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED While deciding the fate of your subjects and going on quests are common strategy-game conventions, the text-heavy, illustrated presentation frequently makes KING OF DRAGON PASS feel more like a book than a game.





LET SLIP THE COWS OF WAR The auto-resolved battles are neatly summed up for you, detailing the losses for both sides – and how many cows you plundered.



CGW RATED

PROS
Rich fictional world; myriad strategic choices

CONS
No visual feedback beyond its hand-drawn screen graphics

Requirements: Pentium processor, 16MB RAM, 42MB hard drive space **Recommended Requirements:** None **3D Support:** None **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: A Sharp • **Developer:** A Sharp • $37.50 • a-sharp.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; realistic violence, suggestive themes.

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What's in a Name? In the Case of ABOMINATION, Lots

As Advertised

ABOMINATION: THE NEMESIS PROJECT

Reviewed by Raphael Liberatore

ABOMINATION is almost a good game. With its RPG-style background and depth, the game offers action-packed strategy similar to a real-time JAGGED ALLIANCE or X-COM...until your team gets into a scrap. Then all hell breaks loose and you're stuck playing a game that shoots itself in the foot again and again with its inadequacies and shortcomings.

A terrible virus, mutants, cultists, a top-secret government facility, a team of biologically engineered special agents – can't anyone come up with an original post-apocalyptic game premise? Oh well, if you can muster the energy, it's your job to outfit and lead a group of 16 commandos, each possessing the standard skills – in addition to the standard cybernetic attributes – as you struggle to stop the carnage and save mankind.

After choosing and equipping your team of four agents, you pick a mission via the files screen, then head off to the overview map where you try to figure out your team's immediate objectives – be it destroying a facility, doing some recon, uncovering a special item, or a combination of goals. ABOMINATION randomizes over 1.2 million tactical sites on 25 different maps, so you'll really never do the same thing twice in the same area. The interface, however, is so messy that you'll spend considerable time just figuring out how to launch your team into action. Once you do, the game moves into a colorful and graphically-appealing tactical 3D-environment – even at the 640x480 resolution you're forced to employ.

The real problems surface in combat. For a game touting strategy and tactical elements, a variety of squad formations would have been a blessing – especially when the enemy is tossing grenades and other explosives into your bunched-up group. And your cybernetically enhanced and utterly useless squad will make your blood boil. There's Detonate, a demo expert whose grenades injure team members; Pyro, who can psychically firebomb monsters but does more damage with a submachine gun; and the worthless Doc, a medic with low combat abilities rendered obsolete by the abundant medical supplies strewn about the maps. Changing equipment and weapons during the thick of battle is also more of a hassle than what it's worth, since it forces your agents to waste precious seconds of combat, without offering any real advantages.

The combat AI focuses too much on artificial and not enough on intelligence, reducing fights to sloppy street brawls. So much for tactics. Fortunately, when the combat really gets frantic, you can pause the game and reissue orders. When combat is over, your team spends too much time scavenging the city rather than saving the world, though the scavenger hunts are necessary since the weapons you'll find are essential later in the game.

FLU SHOTS Group your agents together and concentrate their fire on one target at a time. Otherwise, they'll get picked off one by one.

EQUIPMENT CHECK There're over 150 different weapon and equipment types with which you can arm your agents. You'll have to research the technology base to make them available.

Missions are gathered into clumps called chapters, and the last two chapters of the game are almost impossible to finish unless you complete the right tasks early in the game – yet ABOMINATION blithely lets you progress to its impossible end. Saving games is also a problem, since you can't save in the middle of combat, and even worse, you can almost never dump one agent in favor of another after starting a chapter – at least without killing them first. Why can't you choose a four-man team prior to *every* mission?

What won't drive you nuts in ABOMINATION? Well, as the game progresses, your once-common agents become wrecking machines as they gain experience and skills. Short missions keep the game moving along at a nice pace. And the multiplayer options are good, allowing up to eight players for Capture the Flag, Hold Position, Deathmatch, and other games.

ABOMINATION has potential, but squanders it. To enjoy it, you must have the patience to endure the extremely tough missions, clumsy equipment-management systems, worthless cybernetic attributes, crappy AI, and chaotic battles. And if you can manage that, you're not a gamer, but a saint. CGW

CGW RATED

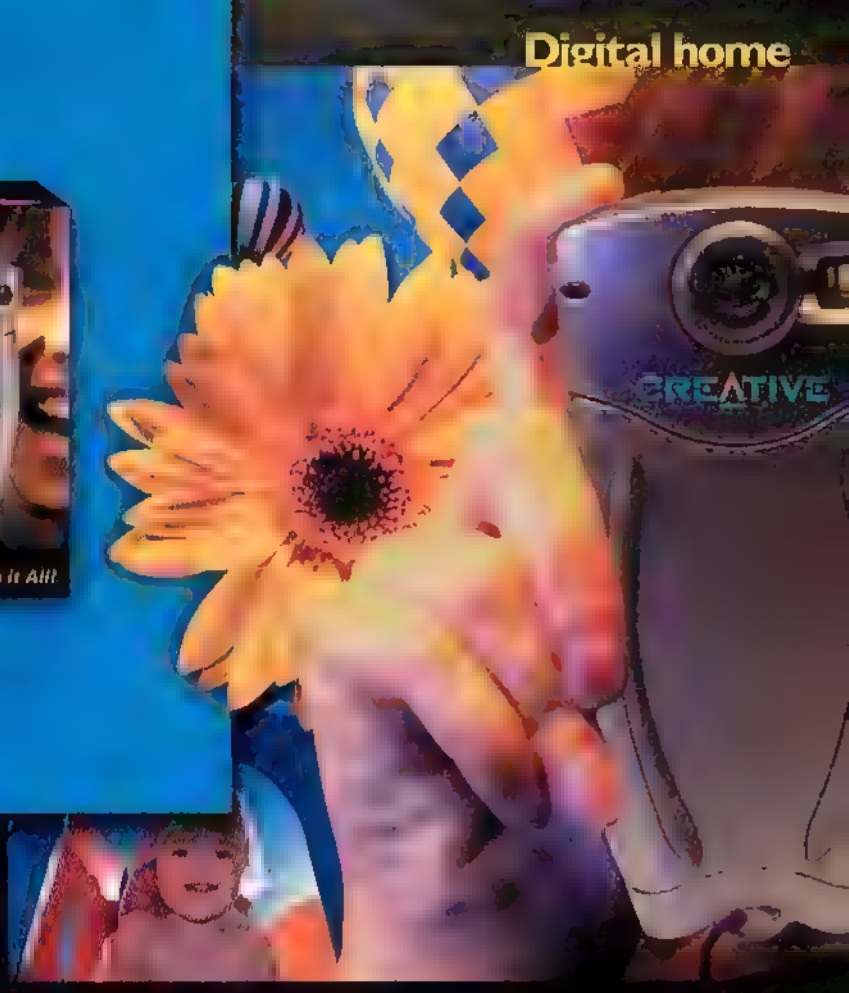
PROS
Fast-paced missions; character skill enhancements; multiplayer options.

CONS
Mediocre combat; unintuitive menus; predictable AI; cumbersome equipment management; overly difficult missions.

CARNAGE-A-COPIA It may not have the deepest, most compelling gameplay, but ABOMINATION does serve up plenty of meat.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 400MB hard drive space, 2MB graphics card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 200MHz, 64MB RAM, 6MB graphics card, EAX sound card. **3D Support:** Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** Serial, modem, email (2 players), Internet, LAN (2-8 players); one CD per player.

Publisher: Eidos Interactive • **Developer:** Hothouse Creations • **$40** • www.eidos.com
ESRB Rating: Mature: animated blood, gore, and violence.



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SEPTERRA CORE Is a Treat for Serious Anime Fans Only

Prophecy Unfulfilled

Maya is having a bad day. If life weren't tough enough already – living on the second of the planet Septerra's floating World Shell continents, living off the garbage tossed from the elite Chosen up above – she now has to deal with an invasion, a legendary prophecy, and the discovery of the man who murdered her mother years ago.

That, in a nutshell, is the complicated saga that awaits gamers in SEPTERRA CORE: LEGACY OF THE CREATOR, a Japanese anime-inspired RPG designed by Valkyrie Studios and published by Monolith. Although SEPTERRA CORE isn't a bad game, it owes a *lot* to Square's FINAL FANTASY console games and seems rather uninspired on its own. That – plus a number of serious design flaws – drag it down to mediocre status, despite a captivating story.

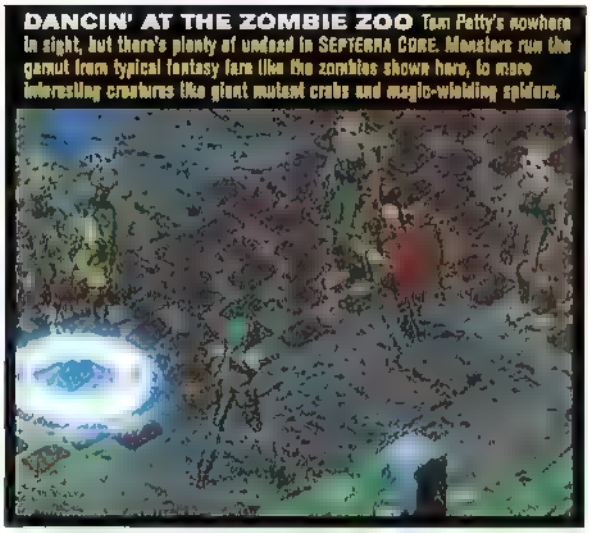
SEPTERRA CORE: LEGACY OF THE CREATOR

Reviewed by Robert Coffey

Dull, Voyager

Gameplay takes the form of a lengthy quest through Septerra's World Shells. Maya and her pals party up to journey from Shell 2 all the way to the mysterious planetary Core, before calling it a day. Characters are well-delineated, featuring obvious and simplistic personality traits (Maya is plucky, Grubb is a geek, Corrgan is noble, and so on); they have traditional RPG statistics for categories like Strength and Agility, along with health points, armor ratings, and the like.

Weapons and other items can be purchased from stores on each Shell. These vary from fantasy role-playing standards such as swords and magic runes to electronic gizmos and automatic rifles. Mechanical weapons are powered by Core Engines that can be upgraded at various stores. Magic is performed with Core Energy – mana drawn from the powerful bio-computer that sits at the center of Septerra – and Fate Cards found along the way. If your Core Energy is high enough, you can use these cards to heal or resurrect party members, blast monsters with the elements, flee combat, and so on. They can also be combined for more varied effects.



DANCIN' AT THE ZOMBIE ZOO Tom Petty's nowhere in sight, but there's plenty of undead in SEPTERRA CORE. Monsters run the gamut from typical fantasy fare like the zombies shown here, to more interesting creatures like giant mutant crabs and magic-wielding spiders.

SEPTERRA CORE is extremely combat-intensive. Many locales are straightforward dungeon crawls without the dungeon. You simply follow an obvious path, wiping out umpteen groups of baddies along the way. And since combat is handled in a phased, turn based style where you must wait for an Endurance bar to build up before performing an action, it can be slow and dull. Even though I was always interested in the storyline, the continuous, repetitive battles wore on my nerves. Playing more than three or four hours at a time proved to be impossible, no matter how much I wanted to go on.

Although there's a lot of interaction with the game's many characters, it's all FINAL FANTASY style – meaning that you simply click your mouse and listen to a lot of long-winded conversations. This gets dreary at times, with all these mini-lectures blending into each other. Modeling all the characters on just a few facial templates doesn't help matters.

Try Before You Buy

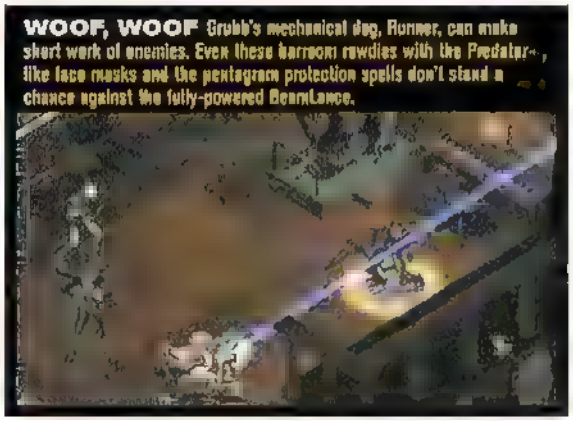
Many years in development, SEPTERRA CORE looks and sounds dated. While attractive, the visuals are locked at a maximum 640x480 resolution. Characters are fuzzy around the edges, and there is never enough of the game on-screen at any given moment. I often walked right into enemies before realizing they were there. Audio is similarly limited. There doesn't seem to be more than two brief pieces of grating music to accompany battles, and the weapon effects occasionally sound like something my Sega Genesis would have produced.

Those tired of waiting for SquareSoft to port FINAL FANTASY VIII to the PC may find SEPTERRA CORE to be a decent enough temporary fix. All of the conventions of that long-running series are present, from the never-ending combat to the tangled affairs of big-eyed lovers. For everyone else, though, this is a definite "try before you buy" game. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Rich storyline and characters; 80+ hours of play; female lead has neither navel ring nor dirigible-sized breasts.

CONS
Tedious combat sequences; crash bugs; too derivative of FINAL FANTASY games.



WOOF, WOOF Grubb's mechanical dog, Runner, can make short work of enemies. Even these barroom rowdies with the *Predator*-like face masks and the pentagram protection spells don't stand a chance against the fully-powered BeamLance.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz MMX; 32MB RAM; 1MB hard drive space. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 233MHz or better, 150MB hard drive space.
3D Support: None. **Multiplayer Support:** None.

Publisher: Monolith • **Developer:** Valkyrie Studios • **$40** • **www.lith.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Teen

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NASCAR Racing 3 Is All the Simulation You'll Need

You Couldn't Ask for Anything More

This won't be a surprise to those of you paying attention, but NASCAR RACING 3 is another huge success for Papyrus Design Group. The wizards at the Sierra subsidiary have produced another racing game that walks the fine line between uncompromising accuracy and a fervent rush to the finish line. If you lean toward precise sims such as GRAND PRIX LEGENDS, you'll find everything you need here. If you favor arcade racers in the NEED FOR SPEED vein, this one will convert you.

Those who've played previous NASCAR titles will be familiar with what this game has to offer. Aside from a few concessions to modernity – like 3D support – there isn't much that's new here. Options remain very similar to what was offered in NASCAR RACING 2. You can take part in single races against computer-controlled pros of your choosing, go into Championship mode and drive a full NASCAR season, or hit the online offramp and take on other human racers in Internet and LAN multiplayer. A total of 28 tracks are included, from Atlanta Motor Speedway through Watkins Glen International, as well as all the top NASCAR drivers, including Jeff Gordon, Dale Earnhardt, and Bobby Wallace.

NASCAR RACING 3
reviewed by Jeff Lund

Bound Up

All of this is bound together in a customizable design that's friendly to newbies and veterans alike. To start playing, simply dumb down the options. Turn the driving mode to Arcade and switch off Damage and Player Breakdowns. To really get going as a NASCAR pro, read through the helpful manual and take advantage of advanced garage settings that let you tweak tire weight and pressure, gear ratios, shocks, weight distribution, and just about everything else.

This flexibility is the best thing that NASCAR RACING 3 has to offer over its predecessors. Where I found that the previous games overwhelmed me with their depth right from the starting line, this one drew me in slowly. Instead of feeling like I'd been ordered to learn esoteric details like gear ratios off the bat, I could go at my own pace. This is thanks to both the adaptable design and an excellent manual, which clearly details what can be done to your car and why.

SORRY 'BOUT THAT As in real NASCAR races, early accidents are a part of virtually every event in NASCAR RACING 3. I'd like to say that John Andretti went into the wall of his own accord here, but I'm afraid I have to accept a little responsibility over the current state of his ride. On the sunny side of things, I escaped unscathed.

SPINNIN' Minor collisions like this spin-out that Jay Jewett and his Brown Hornet forced on me provide a great look at the detailed cars in NASCAR RACING 3.

Service, Please!

NASCAR RACING 3 is only average in terms of visuals and sound. Graphics are crisp, yet oddly undistinguished. Part of this might be due to the rather bland subject matter; aside from the cars themselves, there's not a lot of color to be found surrounding the grey asphalt ovals in Phoenix and Myrtle Beach. The artists didn't go out of their way to jazz things up, either; the pit crew is inanimate, and not even a wheel shows up in the in-car view. Audio is also merely serviceable, with a number of ups and downs. Spotters sound good and walkie-talkie-ish, though the high-revving NASCAR engines aren't as throaty as they should be.

Despite these minor shortcomings, NASCAR RACING 3 is a must-buy for any serious racing game fan. We couldn't ask for anything more than this invigorating mix of the thinking person's sim and a arcade fan's thrill ride. Just don't expect a radical evolution over its predecessor. If you're a happy owner of NASCAR RACING 2, you might want to pass. Of course, that says more good things about the earlier game than bad things about the current one. Just make sure that you've got one of them on your hard drive. CGW

IN THE COCKPIT The in-car camera view offers the most realistic angle on the action, though it actually dulls the sense of speed. For a change of pace – and to check your velocity when hitting those turns – try a few laps using the external cameras.

CGW RATED

PROS
Flexible engine friendly to both newcomers and vets; successfully walks the fine line between rigid simulation and an oil-burning rush.

CONS
Few advances over the previous games in the series.

Requirements: Pentium 160MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 70MB hard drive space, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA video card (supporting 800x600 at 64,000 colors). **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II, 64MB RAM, Direct3D or Glide video, steering wheel and pedals or joystick, Aureal-3D 2.0 sound. **3D Support:** Direct3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 44 players via direct Internet connections, WON.net, IPX, or modem (all players require CDs).

Publisher: Sierra Sports • **Developer:** Papyrus • $50 • www.sierra.com • **ESRB Rating:** All

Grow Out Those 'Burns and Take a Trip to Racing's Past

Doing the Time Warp, NASCAR-Style

In a nutshell, Papyrus' NASCAR LEGENDS is NASCAR RACING 3 set during the 1970 season. All of the drivers, cars, and tracks from that era are present for your simulated pleasure. So if you want to rip by A.J. Foyt in his Ford Torino at the Charlotte Motor Speedway, leave the Dodge Charger Daytona of Bobby Allison in the dust of the Atlanta International Speedway, or blow the doors off Cale Yarborough's Merc at Richmond Fairground Raceway, this is the title for you.

Other options are identical to those in NASCAR RACING 3. You can play arcade style by turning off such things as vehicle damage, and turning on steering and shift assist. Races can be run as one-offs, or played through in a Championship mode that recreates the entire season. Full Internet multiplayer races are supported. Cars can be tweaked to your heart's content. Playing in full-simulation mode means actually dealing with the dirty details, so be sure to read through the thick manual for tips on regulating tire temperature, manipulating cambers, playing with suspensions, and so on.

NASCAR LEGENDS

reviewed by Brett Todd

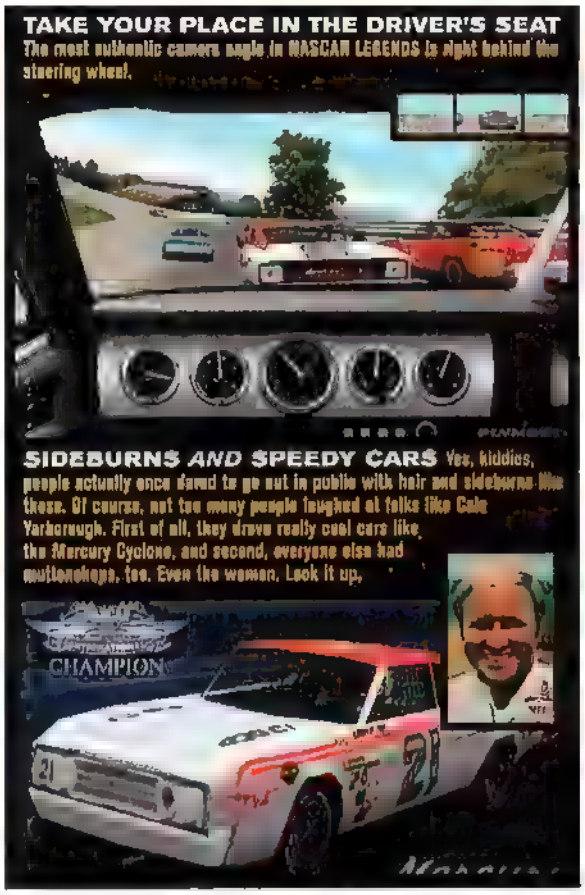
Legendary Driving

Befitting its name, NASCAR LEGENDS is closer to last year's GRAND PRIX LEGENDS than NASCAR RACING 3 in terms of feel. While the uniquely-American NASCAR atmosphere remains, it's offset by a more rigorous driving model, comparable to that seen in Papyrus' more European titles. Don't expect today's technologically advanced wonder cars to save you on the turns; you're driving your father's Plymouth, remember, and the entire setting is less forgiving. As someone who used to drive a '76 Dodge Monaco that handled like a school bus stuck in wet cement, this is exactly what I expected. Let's face it, these behemoths were tough to handle.

Also, some aspects of the game aren't as refined as modern racers have come to expect. Pit stops can be incredibly hazardous. More than once I pulled out and found myself unable to avoid traffic, resulting in some incredible pile-ups. Stops were more frequent than I expected, too, as I burned through tires like they were going out of style (which, of course, they really did, about 25 years ago).

Personally, I appreciated both the time warp and the extra challenge. Other gamers might not. Even those with plenty of NASCAR sim experience might find the game slightly off-putting. There's a lot to learn, and your experience with previous NASCAR games won't apply here. So be warned: If you find NASCAR RACING 3 tough already, the journey back to 1970 will be a frustrating one.

A less-welcome "challenge" for me was the wonky control setup. No matter how hard I tried, the game wouldn't recognize the D-pad on my Microsoft Sidewinder gamepad. I could use the buttons, but never the X- or Y-axis. This didn't bother me too much, as I prefer my Sprint wheel and pedal-set anyhow, but pad drivers should take heed of this problem. I also experienced a number of fatal crashes that booted me back to the desktop, and a flashing mouse cursor on occasion. All in all, the title just didn't feel stable on my system.



High Value...With One Reservation

Presentation values in NASCAR LEGENDS are exactly the same as in NASCAR RACING 3. Graphics are good, with sharp visual quality and 3D support that goes to a crisp 1024x768. The cars look nice and feature the special gloss that vehicles seemed to possess back in the '70s. Tracks are drawn well, although there is a minimum of special effects and surrounding terrain. Audio is great, with rumbling engine bass deep enough to shake windows all over the top floor of my house.

My main reservation about NASCAR LEGENDS is that it's not really necessary. It seems more like a really good add-on to NASCAR RACING 3 than a stand-alone, full-priced product. This might cause some serious qualms at the cash register, especially for those who plunked down 50 bones for the original game a couple of months back. Judged wholly on its own merits, however, NASCAR LEGENDS is a game worthy of recommendation, even with the few bugs noted above. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS
Excellent recreation of the 1970 NASCAR season; authentic cars, drivers, physics.

CONS
More of a great NASCAR RACING 3 mod than a game in its own right; buggy control system; some crashes and glitches.

Requirements: Pentium 166MHz MMX, 32MB RAM, 70MB hard drive space, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA video card (supporting 800x 600 at 64,000 colors).
Recommended Requirements: Pentium-II, 64MB RAM, Direct3D or Glide video, steering wheel and pedals or joystick, Aureal-3D 2.0 sound. **3D Support:** Direct3D, Glide. **Multiplayer Support:** Up to 44 players via direct Internet connections, WONnet, IPX, or modem (all players require CDs).
Publisher: Sierra Sports • **Developer:** Papyrus • **$50** • **www.sierra.com** • **ESRB Rating:** Everyone

Interview with the Team of Thief II: The

"We think that Thief is really built around having the most sophisticated AI system available today."

STEVE PEARSAL - Project Leader

You have a pretty hard act to follow, with fans expecting a great deal of the sequel to Thief. Are you daunted by the task at all?

When we did Thief: The Dark Project we were really exploring a new genre, the first person sneaker, as we like to call it. Since no one else had really built a first person game around a stealth concept before, we had to do a lot of trial and error experimenting to find out what was fun and what didn't work so well. Now with the benefit of our experience from Thief 1, as well as a lot of really good feedback from Thief 1 players, we are confident that we can take this whole concept of a "first person sneaker" to a higher level with a better tuned, more focused design and execution which we think will lead to an even more fun and immersive game.

In terms of gameplay, you've made no secret of the fact that you consider the stealth element of the concept to be the factor that ensured success for the original. How will you keep all those stealth addicts happy with Thief 2? What do you have planned in terms of interface innovation?

Well a lot of the new powerups or tools that we have planned are centered around making Garrett a better thief. We want to give the player more opportunity to scout out the mission areas so that they can come up with a more thought out plan instead of just reacting to what they run into. So you'll see some sort of Thiefly tool that allows you to see into an area without exposing yourself to being discovered by the AI's.

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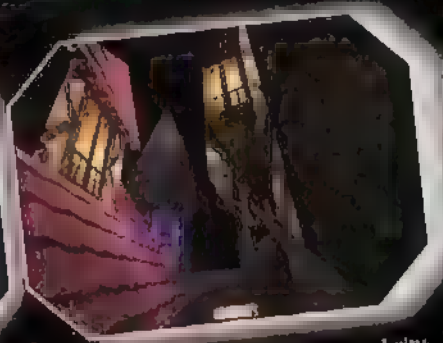
THIEF II

THE METAL AGE

Metal Age



Can you detail the story of Thief 2? You mentioned Garrett was going to be involved in far more human-based missions. Can you elaborate on this? How important do you consider plot to be to this type of game?

We've got some great plot twists planned for Thief 2 and I certainly don't want to ruin anyone's surprise and enjoyment of how the story unfolds but basically you can think of Thief 2 as a three act play. In the first act Garrett is just trying to make a living as a master Thief but he runs into increasing interference from the city sheriff. In act two Garrett discovers why the Sheriff is hassling him so much more than in the past. In act three, Garrett uncovers the plans of the bad guys, leading him into a big confrontation with the boss bad guy. Garrett will be operating mostly in the city itself and so the missions will be set in more of a city setting. You'll see missions set in places you'd expect to find in a city, like rich people's mansions, banks, churches, and city streets.

How do you think Thief affected the FPS genre? Do you think Thief succeeded on the 'stealth factor' due to a stagnation in the genre?

The FPS genre has been moving towards games with more immersive gameplay set in deep, believable worlds. Thief succeeded because we were able to create a believable compelling world that supported our core gameplay concept that you become a master thief. A big part of that was that our AI's had to be good enough to convince the player that hiding from them was a believable and fun challenge.

Finally, what is it about Thief 2 that you hope will make it stand out from a considerable crowd? What are your plans after the completion of the game?

We think that Thief is really built around having the most sophisticated AI system available today. Thief's success is based on being able to simulate believable opponents to steal and hide from. No one else has AI good enough to really pull this off and we think it will be awhile before any one else can catch up to us – especially because we don't plan to sit still so there will be a moving target to catch up with.

Not only will the AI system in Thief 2 be the best you can get in any game engine available today, but because of our experience developing Thief 1 along with the feedback we've received from our fans we will be able to craft a better focused, more sophisticated stealth experience. In other words, we can take the whole core stealth experience to the next level.

Probably the first thing we will all do is take three or four weeks off and recuperate from the inevitable crunch time it takes to get a good game out the door. Seriously though, we will be working on taking the Thief franchise to a new level.

WWW.METALAGE.COM

RP

LOOKING GLASS STUDIOS

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

Interview with Deus Ex team

What made you choose Latin?

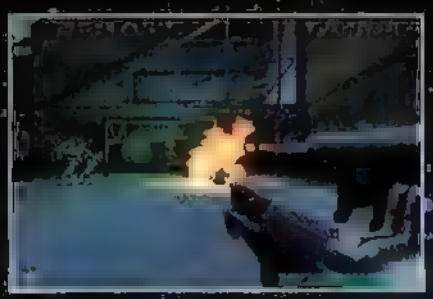
WS The phrase "Deus Ex" is a shortened version of "Deus Ex machina," a literary term I've always liked. Here's the dictionary definition (courtesy of the WWWebster online dictionary):

Main Entry: de·us ex ma·chi·na
Pronunciation: 'dA-&s-"eks-'mä-ki-nä, -'ma-, -'mä; mä-'shE-nä
Function: noun
Etymology: New Latin, a god from a machine, translation of Greek theos ek mEchanEs
Date: 1697
1: A god introduced by means of a crane in ancient Greek and Roman drama to decide the final outcome.
2: A person or thing (as in fiction or drama) that appears or is introduced suddenly and unexpectedly and provides a contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty.

But that's probably not what you were looking for.

The fact that "deus ex" is Latin, translated from Greek, didn't really enter into the decision. We settled on the name because it actually rewarded knowledge – if you know what "deus ex machina" means, you know a little something about the game that other people won't know until they've played for a while.

Mostly, though, we chose "Deus Ex" because I thought it sounded cool and mysterious.



Storyline in games has become paramount nowadays. Can you give us a brief description of the story behind Deus Ex and why the story is important to Deus Ex' gameplay?

WS Well, we don't want to reveal too much about the story – have to leave some mysteries for players to solve! What we can say is that Deus Ex is the story of J.C. Denton – the player character – a guy who works for an international agency called the UN Anti-Terrorist Coalition. His job in our near future

world is to fight terrorists hellbent on hijacking priceless shipments of the only known treatment for a killer virus called the Gray Death. Little by little J.C. discovers that the terrorists may not be as bad as they seem. In fact, they make a lot of sense, once you start paying attention. And UNATCO? They seem a little bloodthirsty but they make some sense, too. It's all a little confusing.

As for why story is important, well, it provides context – meaning – for all of the player's choices. Plenty of games get by without much of a plot but they seem kind of empty and tend to devolve fairly quickly kill-everything-that-moves or experiences are limited to solve-the-next-goofy-puzzle. In Deus Ex, we want players thinking constantly about why they're doing what they're doing. We want them thinking how their actions might affect the people who live in our gameworld. A story filled with interesting characters with interesting lives has a chance of giving each player's actions some meaning.

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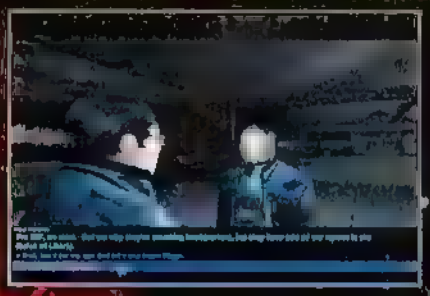


Everyone and their mother is talking about genre blending. What is genre blending to you, and do you feel Deus Ex blends genres? If so which genres and how?

WS I don't know that we set out to blur the lines between genres. There's just something in the air these days, a sense that people – developers, players – are bored with the Same Old Thing. They've played traditional roleplaying games and adventure games and shooters and they're looking for something new. Combining elements from a variety of genres is one way to try to do something different which keeps us interested, as developers, and (we hope!) will appeal to players, too.

We just wanted to make a game that didn't railroad players into guessing what the designers wanted them to do minute-to-minute. That pretty much dictated that we'd have real-time action, skill use and conversation – and that right there pushed us into the "uncategorizable" category. More to the point, it means some people look at Deus Ex and see a shooter, others see a roleplaying game and still others see an adventure game. In the end, they're all right.

Does the blurring of genre lines make it easier or harder to balance and tweak gameplay? Is it possible to make a single game that pleases fans of several radically different genres? In other words, will Jon Shooter, Jane Roleplayer and Jackie Adventure-Gamer all find ways to enjoy their time in the world of Deus Ex?

WS Certainly, our goal is to ensure that fans of a variety of genres find something to like in Deus Ex. We're really for gamers to tell us how close we came to achieving that goal. I'll tell you, it's a heck of a tough goal! Balancing the gameplay so no one path or character choice is overpoweringly better than any other is a real challenge. The guy who blasts his way through every situation and the person who talks to everyone and kills no one must both have fun and must both have a chance of success. Tough, tough, tough...

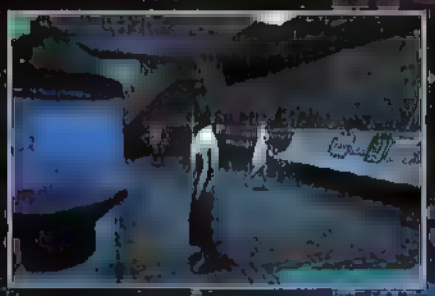
Given that Deus Ex blurs the lines separating a variety of genres, how would you describe the game so Joe (or Jane) Consumer can make an informed decision about whether he or she is likely to enjoy it?

WS The easy answer (at least for game geeks) is that I hope people can look back at some earlier games and say, "I liked those. Deus Ex is the next step in the evolution of games like that. I'll probably like Deus Ex." And what earlier games would I cite as our predecessors? Ultima Underworld... System Shock... Thief... HalfLife. I'm not saying we'll be as great as those games – though I hope we will! – but they're the games we took the most inspiration from.

For non-game geeks, I guess I'd say Deus Ex is for you if you want a game that really immerses you in an alternate world and lets you decide how to interact with the people you meet there and the situations you encounter.

What one message would you want to convey to gamers about Deus Ex?

WS Deus Ex is a game about character development in which all of your character choices are expressible, minute-to-minute, in gameplay and every choice you make has a price – everything has consequences and nothing comes for free.



What features have been added to the Unreal engine that will set Deus Ex apart from other first-person 3D games?

WS Most of the features we've added to the engine have been RPG-centric. Since Unreal is a straightforward shooter, it doesn't have support for a sophisticated inventory system or the skills and augmentation systems your character has in Deus Ex. We've added blended animations, real-time lip syncing, advanced AI, a powerful conversation system (complete with a standalone editor), a traveling flag system to save the game state between maps, a sophisticated user-interface library that's used heavily by the many UI screens in the game, and countless other improvements.

You've mentioned AI and physics as things you've enhanced in the Deus Ex version of the Unreal engine. Has this led to any unexpected behavior on the part of characters or objects in the game world? Are you seeing any "emergent behavior" – things the designers didn't plan or anticipate? And, if so, is that a problem or a feature? Can you plan fun that's based on the unexpected?

EM Here's my favorite example of emergent behavior: I was standing on top of a three-story building with a pistol. Guards were patrolling below me, oblivious to my presence. I fired off a couple of rounds, which the guards shouldn't have heard because the pistol was silenced. But one of the guards drew his weapon, turned, and started looking around for me, because the shell casing from my pistol had fallen three stories and landed next to him, and he heard it. From my perspective as the AI programmer for Deus Ex, emergent behavior is a feature, not a bug. There's nothing cooler than doing something unexpected in a game and seeing it work the same way it would in our world. It makes the game world feel immersive and real.

You've said that character development is the heart of roleplaying. How important is character development to the Deus Ex experience?

WS All game problems in Deus Ex can be solved in more than one way and the choices you make about your character make certain kinds of problem solutions more viable FOR YOU than other kinds of solutions. In other words, if you're the guy who says, "I want to develop my weapon skills" you're likely to get through the game lugging around lots of weapons and creating all sorts of carnage. Conversely, if you're the guy who says, "I want to develop my computer skill" you're going to look for computers and ATMs and security systems to hack and probably avoid combat whenever possible. Character choices expressible in gameplay are what Deus Ex is all about. But the important part of that is "expressible in gameplay" as opposed to the bit about "character choices." Character development in and of itself isn't the point, really.

EIDOS.COM

RP

ION STORM

EIDOS INTERACTIVE

The Aptly Named ODIUM is Boredom-in-a-Box

Odious

What made X-COM and FALLOUT great games was a fine balance of turn-based RPG strategy, adventure, and combat action. Clones, of course, followed. You can now add ODIUM to the list of badly stumbling pretenders, bogged down by a painfully slow and repetitive combat system and a misguided tendency to tell you a story rather than to let you discover it yourself. This makes for a very boring game.

As the leader of a three-member team of NATO commandos, your mission is simple: Find out what happened to another commando team lost in a city called Gorky 17. Your team enters the city underequipped and underqualified (wait, aren't these guys supposed to be the "best of the best"?), thus beginning the wheezing story of science gone-wrong in combination with deadly government secrets, as you battle through a city ravaged by voracious mutants. You'll also run into a few helpful characters along the way.

Gameplay in this third-person game is divided into Adventure and Battle Modes. You search for clues in the real-time Adventure Mode, interacting with objects and both human and mutant characters. While the interface is fairly simple, a camera control for reaching obscure areas would have prevented an occasional inability to see vital objects and areas. Since characters do pick up a decent variety of weapons and useful items during the adventure—it'd be nice to be able to find them more easily.

And Now for Something Completely Different...

Once mutants appear, the game shifts into the turn based Battle Mode. The combat sequences take place on a grid system, with team members attacking or defending within a specified range depending on their weapon, movement allowance, and level. Characters can only attack once per turn, but can heal each other or trade items without penalty. Combat can get dreadfully slow – each attack slogs through a scripted pre-combat ritual, like bringing the weapon to bear before performing the attack. The limitations of the combat system are very apparent in the way it forces you to frequently get within a monster's attack range; a rifle that unloads 800 rounds a minute at a maximum effective range of over 800 meters isn't particularly useful unless it's crammed down the mutant's throat – and it still fires only once per turn. In addition, the combat is boring – even though there's a variety of monster types, each monster attacks and behaves similarly.

Game strategy principally involves placing your characters for the best possible attack and defense. This placement becomes very important when your team is guarding an unarmed character they picked up along the way.

CITY OF THE ALMOST DEAD ODIUM's dark and sinister 3D environments set the mood for its near-passable storyline. If only the combat was this good....

TOUGH HOMBRE As the adventure moves deeper into the city, you'll find tougher monsters with higher armor and hit-point values. Make sure you save the good weapons for later.

Learn While You Earn

On a positive note, ODIUM allows characters to receive instant experience for their actions during combat. Simply hitting a monster in combat rewards you with experience points. As a result, a character's range and damage ability steadily improve as they fight. When a squad member does increase a level, a character screen instantly appears and halts combat, allowing you to distribute their newly-acquired skill points where you deem appropriate. This is one of the more enjoyable parts of the game, but a lack of real RPG depth makes this a pretty limited source of fun.

ODIUM's sound effects and background music help establish a grim and creepy mood, until the campy dialogue and limp voice-acting kneecap it. ODIUM's game environments possess a gritty war-torn feel with some cool shadow effects, making Gorky 17 feel like some really bad acid trip set in industrial Transylvania.

ODIUM is easy enough to finish in one weekend, and with its scripted – yet predictable – adventure story, this game has little to no replay value. Add some boring monsters and the poorly designed combat grid system, and ODIUM smells almost as bad as its title would suggest. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Many 3D environments; classic RPG elements; easy to learn interface; rock-solid engine.

CONS

Boring monsters; campy dialogue; endless, repetitive combat; pitiful weapons range.

HI-DIDDLY-HO, NEIGHBOR! ODIUM breaks a little bit from the X-COM model by letting you interact with various characters, like this aging thief.

Requirements: Pentium 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 250MB hard drive space, graphics card with 2MB RAM. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II, 64MB RAM.
3D Support: Direct3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Monolith • **Developer:** Metropolis Software House • **$48** • www.lith.com
ESRB Rating: Mature, animated blood and violence.

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UbiSoft Offers a Cross-Platform Fix for Your Gamepad Jones

Need Consoling?

Make no mistake; from game design to graphic styling, RAYMAN 2 is a console game. One could even argue that it's a great console game. But does a great console game make a great computer game? In the case of RAYMAN 2, the answer is...almost.

You play the part of Rayman, an affable creature lacking arms, legs, and neck. Having your feet, head, and hands floating free may sound strange, but it works well visually. And, although RAYMAN 2 is not as graphically complex as some current PC titles, it looks very good; the clean, simple graphics create the atmosphere of a 3D cartoon. Adding to the cartoon feel are sound effects reminiscent of a Warner Brothers production. This design approach, combined with amusing cut scenes and tempo-controlling background music, keep the mood of the game light and fun.

The generic "collect the shattered power crystals and defeat the evil forces" plot is more than offset by the level design. Although each level has the obligatory platform jumping, switch flipping, and "floozle" collecting, all the main levels offer something new. Before finishing the game, you'll have flown a pirate ship, water-skied behind a serpent, rafted on molten lava, and piloted a rocket strapped between your non-existent legs.

RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE

Reviewed by Joe "Biker" Bellay

Unfortunately, RAYMAN 2 suffers from three common cross-platform flaws: compatibility, control, and save-game problems. I tried installing the game on three different systems, and had problems on each. To be fair, two of the systems (both P-II 400s) had weak video chips, but they are representative of what many people have purchased recently. After a few calls to UbiSoft's excellent tech line, I put a spare Voodoo1 in one of the systems and the game ran fine.

RAYMAN 2 won't let you re-map controls, although the defaults seem logical. Movement controls may frustrate some players, as they are applied relative to the game camera instead of to Rayman. This means that when Rayman is running toward you, his right is your left, his backward is your forward; his death is your expletive. It also means that when the camera pans, Rayman does a boolleg maneuver without any change to your input.

Winning the "most annoying feature" category, RAYMAN 2 requires you to complete a level before you can save the game, although there are "soft saves" during the level. Because of this feature, you will sometimes find yourself playing just to make it to the next save-portal. Yeah, that's fun.

Despite its shortcomings, RAYMAN 2 manages to get a lot of things right. If you are a fan of console games, or are looking for a light, fun action game, RAYMAN 2 may be the armless, legless, neckless man for the job. CGW

CGW RATED

PROS

Gameplay variations keep levels interesting; good graphics and sound.

CONS

Some compatibility problems; movement control issues; minimal save-game opportunities.

KEG PARTY Whoever said "what you can't see can't hurt you" never got blindsided by a powder keg.

Requirements: Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, Voodoo1 or 4MB D3D video card. **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium 200, 64MB Ram, Voodoo2 or 16 MB D3D video card, gamepad. **3D Support:** Glide, D3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: UbiSoft • **Developer:** UbiSoft • **$30** • www.ubisoft.com
ESRB Rating: Everyone

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We Could Be Coasters, Just for One Day

Omikrud

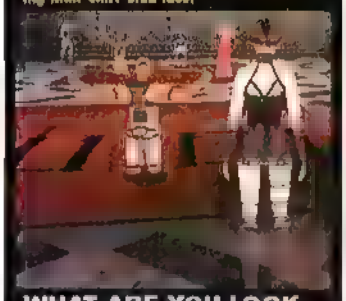
As a music CD, OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL is a *tour de force*; as a computer game, it is a big disappointment. The concept of wrapping an adventure game around a David Bowie album is a cool one – the problem here is with the execution. And your own execution will look more and more desirable, the longer you attempt to play this game.

I had high hopes for OMIKRON. With a gigantic, living world full of characters, interactive environments, and sci-fi coolness, it could've been everything we wanted BLADE RUNNER to be, with elements of fighting games and first-person shooters thrown in. David Bowie – ever on the cutting edge – not only composed all the music, but also appears as two characters and "performs" in secret concerts that take place in the game world. This is by far the only redeeming quality of the whole experience.

OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL

reviewed by Jessa Kirk

DOES THIS DRESS MAKE ME LOOK FAT? One of the cooler ideas in OMIKRON is the ability to reincarnate after death into the bodies of a variety of different characters. Here, we've assumed the body of a hotchy mini-skirt-clad lass.



WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT, BUDDY? Although you can talk to almost anyone in the game – which makes it seem that the game is highly interactive at first – you soon find that most conversations are useless.

OMIKRON's attempt to cross genres fails on all counts. The adventure component is huge – but linear and boring. You quickly learn that there's nothing alive about the world. You can walk around all day, and talk to whomever you want; but absolutely nothing is going to happen to you, and you're not going to learn anything important until you do that one little obscure thing the designers wanted you to do next. Add to the mix a hundred more useless errands, terrible voice-acting, and a paper-thin plot that takes itself way too seriously, and you've got a recipe for crap soup.

The adventure would have been tolerable if the action sequences were cool enough to function as rewards for your perseverance. No such luck. The worst PlayStation fighting games look good next to OMIKRON. It's practically all combo-based, with none of the art or graceful flow of a SOUL EDGE or TEKKEN. First it's too hard, then it's too easy; rarely is it fun.

The first-person-shooter mode is even worse. Every time you get into a gunfight, it's a complete game-stopper. It's hard to aim, and if you do hit something, oftentimes nothing happens. Enemies pop up out of thin air right in front of you, and the movement is clunky and barely manageable.

ATTACK OF THE GUY IN THE TOWEL The game's fighting mode is mediocre at best, and doesn't come close to the action found in a real fighting game.

The only good thing that could come out of this game is if it inspires others to do it right the next time. There was a good idea here, but it was completely squandered. For Bowie completists only. CGW

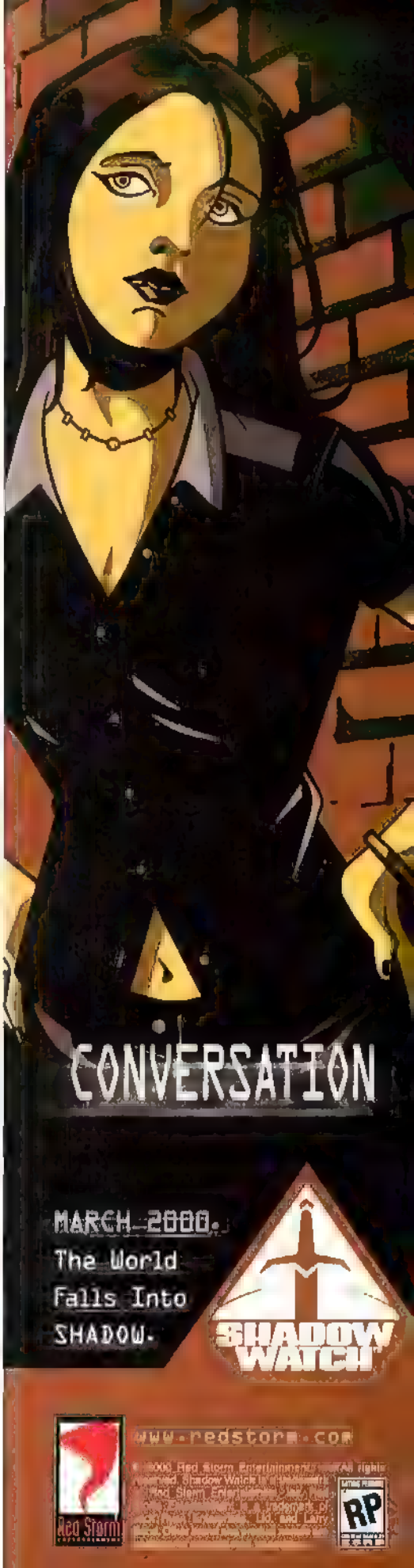
CGW RATED

PROS
A valiant effort by Bowie to break new ground; he does all the music and appears in the game.

CONS
Terrible gameplay wrecks Bowie's effort.

Requirements: Pentium-II 200MHz, 32MB RAM, 350MB hard drive space **Recommended Requirements:** Pentium-II 266MHz, 64MB RAM, 1.6GB hard drive space. **3D Support:** Direct 3D **Multiplayer Support:** None

Publisher: Eidos • **Developer:** Quantic Dream • **$45** • www.nomadsoul.com • **ESRB Rating:** Teen; animated blood and violence, mature sexual themes.



QUICK HITS

PRO PINBALL: FANTASTIC JOURNEY

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD EDITORS' CHOICE

In rock-n-roll, it was the King. In baseball, the Babe. And in the chic, high-flying world of computer pinball simulations, it's Empire Interactive and Cunning Developments, a team that has brought gamers not only the best pinball simulations, but some of the best games, period. PRO PINBALL: FANTASTIC JOURNEY is Cunning Developments' latest (and as rumor has it, last) game in a series of pinball sims that included last year's award-winning pinball masterpiece, BIG RACE U.S.A.

The magic formula for these games is equal parts amazing ball physics, clever table design, and a tight package of sights and sounds that gives each game a unique personality. Playing the Jules Verne-themed FANTASTIC JOURNEY is a lot like playing an adventure game; you slowly figure out the table's "puzzles," then coax your ball on its way through a series of quests involving a submarine, river boat, hot air balloon, and subterranean drill machine, all played out visually on the overhead scoring display.

★★★★½

While generally on par with previous efforts in the line, FANTASTIC JOURNEY is a much less accessible design than the previous releases. The wide-open board emphasizes sequences of long, precision shots at drop targets and ball sinks, and the ball tends to "gutter" frequently. And it does take a while for the personality of the board to unfold; you'll have to play a few dozen games before you figure out the basic high-scoring plays. Thankfully, the array of difficulty settings grant some mercy to pinball wimps.

If you have any interest at all in pinball, give your inner-addict some loving and check this game out. *–Chris Lombardi*

Genre: Puzzles and Classics • Publisher: Empire Interactive • Developer: Cunning Developments • $20 • www.empire-interactive.com/propinball/ • ESRB Rating: Everyone

WHO WANTS TO BE A MILLIONAIRE

Genre: Puzzles & Classics • Publisher: Disney Interactive • Developer: Jellyvision • $20 • www.disneyinteractive.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

The real millionaires here are the corporate jackals at ABC and parent company Disney who have turned a simple little quiz show into a license to print money.

But if you're having as much trouble as I am just getting through to the show's toll-free contestant phone number, this bargain-priced game might tide you over.

Everything you know and cherish from the TV show – with the exception of real money – is here: fifteen multiple-choice questions of increasing difficulty, the three lifelines, and just enough of the occasional random rant from your host, evil wind-up toy Regis Philbin, to capture that special, fifth-circle-of-Hell ambiance particular to "The Reeg." Essentially a solo game, it's no surprise the "fastest finger" multiplayer elimination-round falls terribly flat here; unexpectedly, the Phone A Friend lifeline option is carried off very well, with Regis calling a host of his equally disturbed pals who'll let you know that they just tore off a thumbnail rotating tires before giving you their answer. Sadly, the game's biggest drawback is the way it starts repeating scads of questions after merely an hour or so of play.

★★½

It's fun while it lasts, but it doesn't last long. Final answer. *–Robert Coffey*

12 O'CLOCK HIGH: BOMBING THE REICH

Genre: Wargame • Publisher: TalonSoft • Developer: Gary Grigsby and Keith Brors • $50 • www.talonsoft.com • RSAC Rating: Violence, 1

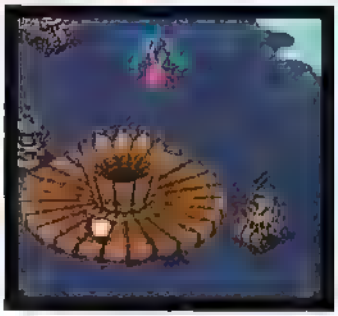
If its predecessor, BATTLE OF BRITAIN, was a novel, then 12 O'CLOCK HIGH: BOMBING THE REICH is an epic. The gameplay is the same, but 12 O'CLOCK HIGH expands the scope of this strategic WWII air-combat game from operations in Southeast Britain to the entire Western Theater. The Allies plan bombing, recon, and fighter-sweep missions by micro-managing each attack or by allowing your staff to fulfill broad orders. The Germans react to raids as the Allies watch the combat. Victory is a function of Allied air superiority, industry, and civilian damage points. Both sides must consider aircraft type, weather, altitude, attack doctrine, the timing between raids, pilot fatigue, morale, and experience.

★★★

The similarities between the two games end there. Instead of concentrating on air forces, 12 O'CLOCK HIGH has eight campaigns on specific target types; two campaigns covering the war from 1943 and 1944; and a hypothetical campaign with jets. It also has three ground campaigns, where success is measured by Allied advances. In longer campaigns, the German player chooses which targets to defend and sets production priorities for new aircraft types. Switching production is risky; no older aircraft will be available for replacements, allowing the Allies a chance to ruin the German economy before the new aircraft deploy. The Allies have resource limits, too, and must balance strategic targets against losses. The initial version has flaws in flak and replacements, which have already been patched.

This game is not for the casual gamer. It's not hard to learn the mechanics, but there are a lot of details, and watching raids may be boring for the Allies. The graphics are serviceable – but pixelated and uninspiring. Yet, students of air warfare and fans of BATTLE OF BRITAIN will find it very rewarding. *–Jim Cobb*

TANKTICS



Gremlin's TANKTICS is a cartoon strategy game with a sense of humor. You assemble tanks from parts produced by your Part-O-Matic, which can be accelerated by sheep. Supply the POM with anything – boulders, tank parts, crates and even sheep – and out come parts for your tanks and the occasional power-up.

In 24 missions, divided into four campaigns, you fight on perverse, miniature-golf-like battlefields going from stone-age through medieval, modern, and future ages. You build tanks from the era you're in. The enemy tanks are drawn from the next period, so your medieval tanks will, for example, face modern opponents. In the future era you face the real enemy, the dreaded Evil Black Tanks, which are an attractive tea-color

★★½☆☆

All this would be pleasant enough if 1) you could issue orders while paused, 2) the interface didn't seem designed to help you make mistakes, and 3) you could SAVE while playing a mission. Having spent four hours battling only to crash at the victory screen, or to watch your most experienced tank rendered inanimate by an inadvertent mouse-click, induces fantasies of throwing the designers into their own Part-O-Matic.
–Samuel B. Baker, II

Genre: Strategy • Publisher: Interplay • Developer: Gremlin • $20 • www.interplay.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

NHL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000

Genre: Sports • Publisher: Fox Sports Interactive • Developer: Radical Software • $50 • www.foxsports.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone

NHL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000 plays more like a true NHL game than its competition, with more team play and a slower pace vs. mad dashes down the ice for breakaway slapshots. The reason is a superb defensive AI that plays like the big leagues; players cover the passing lanes with intelligent positioning. You have to work for shots, and work hard for good shots.

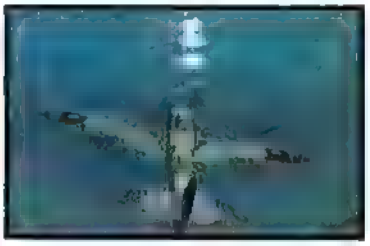
★★★☆☆

But a couple problems mar the gloss on defensive play. The ice is too small, the offensive zone significantly so. On the other side of the ice, weak offensive AI is the biggest obstacle to the game's goal of hockey sim sainthood.

While it's easy to point out its faults, NHL CHAMPIONSHIP 2000 still plays a decent game of hockey, and is more like an NHL simulation than an arcade game. There's a core of a solid sim here, but the problems detract enough to prevent a solid recommendation. *–Jeff Lackey*

NATIONS: FIGHTER COMMAND

Genre: Flight Simulation • Publisher: Psygnosis • $45 • www.psygnosis.com • ESRB Rating: Everyone, animated violence.



If you're going to make a historical flight sim these days, you're going to be in direct competition with something else. Unfortunately, NATIONS: FIGHTER COMMAND picked a fight with real heavyweights, and it's just not up to the challenge. Putting NATIONS in the ring with EAW or JANE'S WWII FIGHTERS would be like a title bout between Gary Coleman and George Foreman.

★☆☆☆☆

The graphics are so-so, the flight models oversimplified, the missions dull, and the controls terrible. It's almost impossible to get it to work with rudder pedals. The lack of standard sim conventions – like putting viewing controls on the function keys – makes one wonder if the designers actually played other games in the genre. If so, they've tried to fix a lot of stuff that wasn't broken.

Ultimately, this feels like an arcade game, but even there it wouldn't pull in many quarters. *–Jesse Hiatt*

3D CARD ROUNDUP

3D in the 21st Century

Another Century, Another Batch of 3D Accelerator Cards. Which Have the Power To Handle Your Gaming Demands? Here's the Hard Data You Need To Decide.

by Loyd Case

Winter brings with it crisp, cold air; snow in the mountains; and new 3D-graphics accelerators. I really wanted to go skiing, but instead I holed up with a Pentium-III and a horde of new graphics accelerators.

On tap is a brood of boards using nVidia's GeForce 256 chip, including three that use the new DDR memory. DDR is a new type of RAM that allows two chunks of information to be transmitted in a single-memory clock cycle, speeding up the process considerably. Standard SDRAM (often termed SDR, or single data-rate memory) hobbled the high fill rate of the GeForce 256 card, but DDR memory alleviates that problem. The chip itself has four pixel pipelines and full acceleration for transform and lighting in hardware (see below for definitions of these techie terms)

Also up this month is S3's new Viper II, the first packaged product born from the merger of S3 and Diamond Multimedia. Viper II uses S3's new Savage 2000 accelerator, which accelerates transform and lighting (similar to the GeForce 256). However, the Savage 2000 only has two pixel pipelines, though they can both do dual texturing in a single pass

Rounding out the roundup is the Matrox Marvel G400, which has robust video-capture features, a flexible TV-tuner, and the capable G400 graphics chip.

How To Choose the Right 3D Card

Choosing a graphics card can be a frustrating exercise. And the huge feature lists and marketing gibberish printed on the side of the boxes don't make it any easier. Here's our short list for choosing a graphics card:

1. Look at the games you're playing.

A flight-sim buff may have different requirements from the hardcore first-person shooter fan. And if you spend all your time playing turn-based strategy games like ALPHA CENTAURI, then spending top-dollar for the latest 3D technology may be a waste.

2. Look at your system.

A new high-powered 3D card may not be well matched to a 266MHz Pentium-II, which won't be able to really feed the card enough polygons to fully utilize its features. If you do have an older system, consider stepping back a generation. Or, consider spending your money on a CPU/motherboard upgrade.

3. Consider other features as well.

Raw performance is great, but if you need TV-out, video capture, or digital flat-panel support, factor those in as well. As always, consider your budget, too.

DICTIONARY OF 3D JABBERWOCKY

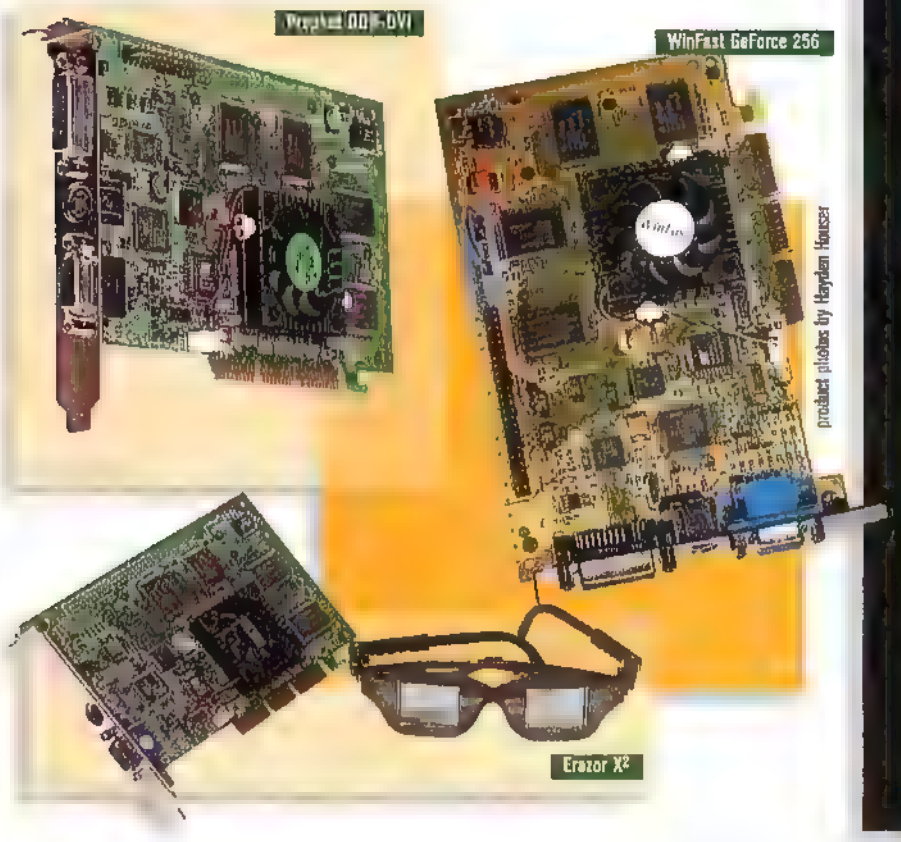
ATI's AFR (alternate frame rendering)
Rage Fury MAXX has two Rage 128 Pro chips, and they "take turns" rendering frames. In essence, one chip handles the front buffer, and the other chip takes care of the back buffer.

3dfx's T-Buffer
3dfx's technology for enabling features like non-intrusive, full-screen anti-aliasing and cinematic effects such as motion blur, soft shadows or depth-of-field effects.

Stencil Buffer
Used to create realistic, volumetric shadows and fog, instead of the more visually distracting "fog plane."

3D CARD ROUNDUP

The Winners



All-Out Performance Winner

There were two clear performance leaders in the bunch. Unsurprisingly, both used Nvidia's GeForce 256 chip, coupled with 32MB of DDR SDRAM.

Hercules rises like the Phoenix to tie for the top spot. Now owned by Guillemot, the Prophet DDR-DVI resurrects the Hercules name as a performance leader. The surprise was Leadtek's WinFast GeForce 256, which essentially tied for first. You can't go wrong with either card – both are fast, have TV-out, and support the emerging DVI digital monitor interface. The Leadtek card might be harder to find, however, since it's not as widely distributed.

All of the DDR RAM-equipped GeForce boards fared very well in the testing. The Creative Labs Annihilator Pro will no doubt be very widely distributed and therefore may be the easiest to find. The ELSA Erazor X^2 offers solid performance, a superb control-panel setup, and the excellent 3D-revelator LCD stereoscopic glasses.

Best Bang for the Buck

With street prices from some mail-order sources under $170, the Viper II is a decent card that can only get better when future drivers add support for the onboard T&L engine. In fact, considering the relatively low clock-rate and slow memory on the card, the Viper II performed quite well.

The Asus V6600 GeForce-based card is an interesting alternative with its robust TV input and output; a DDR version should be shipping by the time you read this. However, the Matrox Marvel G400, despite its low 3D performance, wins kudos for incredibly flexible TV features, hardware-assisted video capture, and excellent video-editing capability

Anisotropic Filtering
A type of texture filtering where the degree of filtering varies, depending upon the relative angle of the object being filtered. Can seriously slow down frame-rate depending on the game and/or card.

Acceleration T/L (Transform and Lighting)
Cards based on nVidia's GeForce 256 and S3's Savage 2000 can take on T/L processing, relieving the CPU of those duties. Transforms involve the moving of polygons from scene to scene, and lighting in this case refers to geometric lights that can have different behaviors

GADGETS FOR GAMERS

MartinLogan Electrostatic Speakers

OK, so these behemoths won't be adorning your PC any time soon, but if you're looking for serious sound for your living room, then give these things a listen. MartinLogan's offerings range in size from fairly large to friskin' huge, and the pricetag scales accordingly. These puppies aren't for the faint of pocketbook, with smaller units starting at around $2000 a pair.

www.martinlogan.com

3D CARD ROUNDUP

	Price	3D GameGauge Score	Rating / Web Address	The Skinny
Hercules 3D Prophet DDR	$299 (after rebate)	61.5	★★★★½ www.guillemot.com	Pricey card with superb performance and an excellent feature set. It marks the rebirth of the Hercules name.
Leadtek WinFast GeForce	$299	61.7	★★★★½ www.leadtek.com	The WinFast offers a nearly-identical feature set to the Prophet, at a slightly lower price.
ELSA Erazor X²	$299	58.6	★★★★ www.elsa.com	Good controls, good performance, terrific stereoscopic glasses as an option.
Creative Labs Annihilator Pro	$249	58.2	★★★★ www.creativelabs.com	Cheaper, but with fewer features; good control panel and decent performance; easy to find.
Asus V6600 Deluxe	$299	55.6	★★★★ www.asus.com	It's only an SDR board, but 3D glasses and good video-input capability make it an interesting choice for multimedia fans.
S3 Viper II	$199 (SRP) $165 street	45.8	★★★★ www.s3.com	Not as fast as the GeForce boards, but good performance at a decent price.
Matrox Marvel G400	$270 street	33.3	★★★½ www.matrox.com	Last year's 3D performance, but offers the best multimedia capabilities of the bunch, including superb TV-out and excellent video-editing capabilities.

GAMING EDITORS' CHOICE

GAMING EDITORS' CHOICE

HOW WE TESTED

3D GameGauge 2.5

This month marks the debut of 3D GameGauge 2.5, *CGW*'s testing metric for evaluating 3D graphics cards. GameGauge averages the frame rates of seven high-end 3D games to yield a single performance score to help you compare 3D cards. 3D GameGauge 2.5 runs the gamut of game genres, including arcade action (EXPENDABLE), first-person shooters (UNREAL TOURNAMENT, QUAKE 3 ARENA), sports (NFL FEVER 2000), racing (RE'VOLT), and simulations (PANZER ELITE and JANE'S USAF).

All the tests are run at 1024x768, except Jane's USAF, which had a bug that prevented us from testing at that resolution, so we ran it at 800x600. You can see the latest results, and run the 3D GameGauge tests on your own rig, too, by downloading the scripts, demos, and patches from **www.3dgamegauge.com**.

Our test system consists of an Intel VC820 motherboard with a 733MHz Pentium-III, and 128MB of PC800 RDRAM. We chose a high-end system so we could differentiate between the cards. We'll be using this test-bed for the next few months, so you'll be able to compare subsequent reviews with this roundup.

In addition to our spiffy new GameGauge 2.5 benchmarking suite, we also use Ziff-Davis' 3D WinBench 2000, which has full support for DirectX 7.0 transform and lighting. 3D WinBench 2000 also solves the vsync problem by disabling it through the DirectX mechanism for disabling vsync. We're also replacing WinBench 99's Graphics WinMark with Business WinStone 99, which tests actual application performance.

	3D GameGauge Score	Content Creation WinStone (1280x768x32)	3D WinBench 2000 (1024x768x32)
Hercules 3D Prophet	61.5	29.0	68.7
Leadtek WinFast GeForce	61.7	28.8	68.7
Creative Labs Annihilator Pro	58.2	28.8	69.0
ELSA Erazor X² (DDR)	58.6	28.5	69.0
Asus V6600 Deluxe (SDR)	55.6	28.9	63.3
S3 Viper II	45.8	27.8	26.6
Matrox Marvel G400	33.3	29.6	31.6

HOW TO INSTALL YOUR NEW 3D CARD

1 Power up the system.

Use the Display control panel to configure your system for the standard PCI-VGA adapter. Reboot. Then, if it's possible, uninstall the old graphics drivers using Add/Remove Programs on the control panel.

2 ...making sure you're grounded yourself...

...remove the bracket screw, and carefully remove the card. Put it away in an antistatic bag.

3 Carefully remove the new card from its packaging.

Slide it into the AGP slot...

...tilting the card slightly so that the rear corner of the connector slides in first, then rock the card forward as gently as possible...

Screw it down.

4 Connect the monitor, then boot the system. If you hear multiple beeps and there's no picture, the card is not all the way in the slot (or may be defective). Assuming the system boots, allow it to configure for the PCI-VGA adapter, then reboot. After the second reboot, install the new drivers with either the Display control panel or a vendor-supplied setup program.

3dfx's Voodoo 4 and Voodoo 5: Worth the Wait?

By the time you read this, 3dfx's Voodoo5 series of graphics cards are still a couple of months out. This brings up an interesting question. Should you wait? Ah, the eternal upgrading question.

Voodoo5 uses two or more 3dfx VSA-100 accelerator chips. (There's also a Voodoo4 card that uses a single VSA-100, but it's not a very compelling card for gaming.) But the real monster is the Voodoo5/6000, which has its own power supply, uses four VSA-100s, and has 128MB of RAM (effectively 32MB, because of the SLI implementation). They'll also be expensive, with a Voodoo5/5500AGP card going for around $300, and a 6000 weighing in at a stunning $600. They'll have tremendous fill rate, and some interesting features – but they will *not* have transform and lighting acceleration.

Of course, their competition also have products waiting in the wings. You could, of course, be waiting forever for the next thing. It's your call, but our take on it is if your current graphics solution is inadequate, then our editor's choice cards will last you for quite some time.

Installation Gotchas To Avoid

[illegible]

Under the Hood

BY LOYD CASE

Fear and Loathing of Copy Protection

We Need Copy Protection, but We Need It to Work

Okay, listen up: We're opening with a short quiz. Question #1: What do the following CD and DVD drives have in common?

Sanyo CRD-256P, Sony CDU77E, Acer CD-624a, MATSHITA UJDB110 Various Pioneer DVD models, Yamaha CD-R, Pioneer DR-A01S, Pioneer DR-A24X, Samsung SCR-1231?

Question #2: What does the TV show "Barney" and UNREAL TOURNAMENT have in common?

The answer to Question #1: These CD and DVD drives—according to Sierra technical support—may not be able to run either HOMEWORLD or HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE The answer to Question #2: Barney videos and UNREAL TOURNAMENT both use copy-protection schemes developed by Macrovision, Inc

Swatting Mosquitoes With a Shotgun

Games have rapid turnover and short lifespans—much more so than business software So publishers need to sell as many copies as possible in a short period of time Software piracy can severely impact a game's sales It's not uncommon for illegal copies to show up on the Net for download—at "Warez" sites—even before they arrive at your local store

Certainly the plethora of cheap, recordable CD drives and media has caused many game publishers much angst as the problem has mushroomed To combat this problem, game publishers have turned to companies like Macrovision to help them protect their intellectual property

Now, I'm all for game companies protecting their titles With game budgets pushing into the millions of dollars publishers and studios need to recoup their investments and turn a profit if we want to see the stream of good game titles continue And because CD-ROMs are much more durable than floppies, I don't even have a problem with the *idea* of CD-copy protection

But what really frosts me is when copy protection punishes me for actually buying a game And given the number of CD/DVD-ROM drives that have trouble with current copy-protection schemes, I'm not alone in this If you've ever gotten an error message like "Please insert game CD"—even though the game CD is *in* the drive—you know what I mean

Some CD drives are incapable of reading some types of copy protection. (Note that some games simply have bugs, and fail if you have multiple drives, but that's not what I'm talking about) At other times, I've had games work, but the CD will wildly thrash with some drives and not others

Who Ya Gonna Call?

What to do if your game doesn't seem to run? First, take your CD and wash it in warm soap and water Some out-of-the-box, new CDs sometimes have a fine film of oil or dust over them that needs to be removed If this doesn't do the trick, contact the game publisher If you do get the "your CD drive may not be supported" spiel, then check the CD-ROM drive-maker's website for an updated driver—although almost none of the CD makers listed in the opening paragraph have updated drivers

What really frosts me is when copy protection punishes me for actually buying a game. And given the number of CD/DVD-ROM drives that have trouble with current copy-protection schemes, I'm not alone in this.

As a last resort, you can take matters into your own hands But let's make this very clear. I do NOT advocate giving away or selling illegal copies of software But if you have no other recourse, check websites like www.gamecopyworld.com. This is *not* a website for pirates—the opening message on the site tries to discourage pirates

And be warned If you try to modify your game program, you will *not* get support from the game publisher in most cases, you will have technically violated your licensing agreement On the other hand if it won't run, you've paid 50 bucks for what is essentially a coffee mug coaster The most useful solution for those "CD not detected" errors is called the "*NOCD crack* " This usually takes the form of a patch that changes your game so that it can run without the CD present If you use it, you run the risk of future game updates from the publisher not working Still it's astonishing how fast NOCD patches appear for updates

This really shouldn't be necessary As hardware and software evolves over time, I hope that software intellectual property can be adequately protected without inconveniencing users But that time, I fear, may be a ways off CGW

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Tech Medics

You've Got Questions, We've Got Answers

by Loyd Case and Dave Salvator

Wounded on the technological front? Our medics may be able to patch you up and get you back into the action. Send your gaming-related technical questions to **cgw_hardware@zd.com.**

Laptop Gaming

I'm looking around for a good laptop computer that can double as a gaming system. But I'd like to put a fast 3D card in it, too. Does anyone make add-on 3D hardware for laptops?

No. You can, theoretically, drop a Voodoo2 card into a docking station that has a free PCI slot, but there's no way to replace the graphics chip in a notebook PC. 3D graphics on mobile systems have seriously lagged after desktop development, mainly because of power requirements and the lack of a business application for high-speed 3D (as if games aren't enough...). And, a GeForce 256 chip that needs 6 amps of current would suck the will-to-live out of a laptop's battery. Both S3 and ATI have started to ship fairly-decent mobile 3D chips; we'll be reviewing those systems when they ship.

Mixing Peripheral Types

I have found a good price on the Suncom F15/SFS throttle [a USB device]. However, I also want rudder pedals; can USB be mixed with game controllers (i.e., rudder pedals) that use the traditional PC game port?

There's only one controller we know of that allows this – Logitech's Wingman Force Feedback joystick – and it's something of a hack. While it's theoretically possible, most USB controllers (and drivers) don't take game-port controllers into consideration. However, CH Products is now shipping their USB Pro Pedals, so give those a try.

Adjusting RAM Speed

Is there any way to adjust memory speed? Say I have PC133 SDRAM. How do I adjust it to run at 100MHz?

It depends on several things. First, do you have a PC133-capable system? If so, all you may need to do is adjust a jumper on the motherboard or in the BIOS setup program.

If you're talking about running PC133 memory on a PC100 system, such as those using the 440BX chipset, then you don't have to do anything. The PC133 memory will run fine at 100MHz. Now, if you want to run it faster, you've entered the realm of over-clocking. Many 100MHz systems allow you to change the clock rate of the front-side bus (FSB). However, while the memory itself may run fine at 133MHz, the chipset may not – or the PCI bus speed may also be raised, causing PCI cards to fail. Tread with care if you start over-clocking the front-side bus.

Scuzy Wuzzy?

What is SCSI, and what is it used for?

SCSI (pronounced "scuzy") stands for "small computer systems interface." It is a means of transferring data between the different components of your computer. It is most commonly used for high-end mass storage devices like hard drives. Most current generation PCI SCSI cards are compatible with a multitude of flavors of SCSI, and also support up to 14 (or more) devices on one SCSI chain.

DVD Games

I've heard that I need a hardware DVD decoder to play DVD games. Is this true?

First, there aren't a lot of DVD games. There's a special release of WING COMMANDER IV, RIVEN, JOURNEYMAN PROJECT 3, BALDUR'S GATE, and maybe a handful more. BALDUR'S GATE doesn't count, since all Interplay did was to cram the CD content onto one DVD. However, the games that support high resolution, DVD-quality video do require a DVD player to play back the cut scenes, even if your system is good enough to support software DVD. This will gradually change over time, as more true DVD titles ship. Windows 98SE and DirectX now have better support for MPEG-2 and other DVD features. CGW

TECH TIP: Free Hard Drive Speed-Up

OK, so it won't be like going from a Fiat to a Ferrari, but by tweaking a system setting for your hard drive, the drive will cache more file names and disk information, letting it fetch data faster.

Right-click on your My Computer icon, select Properties and then select the Performance tab dialogue. Next, click on the File System button, and change the setting from Desktop Computer to Network Server. Click OK, then OK once more to close the System Properties sheet. You'll then need to reboot your machine for the setting to take effect.

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Killer Rigs

Power Rig

Component	Manufacturer	Price	The Skinny
NEW YY Minicube Case	Yeong Yang	$213	Lots of cooling
Motherboard	Intel VC820	$160	AGP 4x
CPU	Coppermine 733	$730	It's the top of the heap, for now
Memory	128MB of PC800 RDRAM	$700	RAMBUS
Disk Controller	Adaptec 2940u2w	$260	80 megabytes per second
Primary Graphics	Creative Labs Annihilator Pro	$270	DDR SDRAM and T&L support
3.5" Floppy Drive	Teac	$20	You still have to have one
Hard Drive	Quantum Atlas 10k	$680	Runs warm, runs fast
Backup	Creative DVD-RAM drive	$599	2 gigs of backup
CD-ROM	Pioneer 6x SCSI DVD	$160	New Pioneer Slot Drive DVD
Monitor	Mitsubish DiamondPro 2020u	$1,250	Perfectly flat; good USB support
Primary Audio	Sound Blaster Live Platinum	$175	For four speaker DirectSound, A3D and EAX
Speakers	Klipsch Promedia	$250	Beautiful imaging, clean sound
Modem	3Com SOSL modem	$400	DSL at last
Networking	3COM EtherLink 10/100 PC	$50	For fragging my buddies
Networking Hub	Netgear DS108	$170	Multiplayer & DSL modem support
Power Supply	PC Power and Cooling Turbocool 300	$99	More power, Scotty
Keyboard	Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro	$59	In with the Newtouch, out with the Natural
Mouse/Pointing Device	Microsoft IntelliMouse Explorer	$86	No balls!
		$6,320	
Flight Joystick	CH F16 Combatstick USB	$55	It just feels right
Rudder Pedals	CH Pro Pedals USB	$100	Nearly perfect foot placement
Driving Controls	ECCI CDS 4000	$1,250	For the serious sim driver
Action Gamepad	Interact Hammerhead FX	$40	DualShock-like controller
		Total $7,775	

The Fine Print All recommendations based on actual evaluations and testing. Prices listed are average low quotes from Web price search engines like www.computershopper.com or www.pricewatch.com. Compiled by Dave Salvator and Loyd Case

Lean Machine

Component	Manufacturer
Motherboard	Asus P3B-F
NEW CPU	Pentium II/600
Memory	128MB PC100 SDRAM
NEW Disk Controller	Built-in UDMA/33
NEW Primary Graphics	Guillemot Xentor 32
Floppy Drive	Teac
Hard Drive	IBM Deskstar 22GXP 9.1GB
CD-ROM/DVD	Pioneer DVD-114
Monitor	Optiquest V95
Primary Audio	Aureal SQ2500
Speakers	Boston Acoustics BA-635
Modem	Actiontec PCI Call-Waiting Modem
NEW Case	Elan Vital T10-A8
Power Supply	Built-in, 235W
Keyboard	Microsoft Internet Keyboard
Mouse/Pointing Device	Logitech USB Wheel Mouse
NEW Joystick	Logitech Wingman Extreme
Action Gamepad	Gravis GamePad USB

WHICH 3D CARD SHOULD I BUY?

If there's one question readers have asked us more than any other, this would have to be it. So, you asked for it, you got it.

Choosing the right 3D card depends on your CPU and your motherboard. We have two recommendations for you.

If your CPU is a Pentium 233MHz or slower, or your motherboard is all-PCI (no AGP), or you've got a motherboard-down AGP graphics chip with no AGP slot, then get 3dfx's Voodoo3 3000 PCI board. At just under $150, the V3 3000 delivers great price/performance, and will do a very good job with current games, and a good job with games coming out soon. And the best part is that when you swap in a new motherboard/CPU, you can migrate the Voodoo3 board to the new setup and use it there until you decide to get an AGP-based 3D card.

If your rig's motherboard has an AGP slot, choose Creative's 3D Annihilator 3D Pro, which goes for around $270 bucks. Admittedly a somewhat-pricey bugger, this GeForce-based board uses DDR SDRAM memory to keep the GeForce's four pipelines fed and happy. If you can't stomach a $270 investment, then consider Creative's 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra, which is available now for around $150.

Even if you're running a Pentium-II 233 or 266MHz CPU, when you upgrade motherboard/CPU, you can migrate either of these cards into your new setup, and they've got room to grow with whatever CPU you mate them with.

GET IT TOGETHER

So you've got all this great gear piled high on your dining room table, and you're asking yourself, "Now what?" It's time to take all these pieces and parts and turn it into the gaming rig of your dreams. So how do you get started? Head over to Loyd's PC Workshop page on GameSpot at www.gamespot.com/features/pc_workshop0/ for step-by-step instructions on how to put your components together and get your killer rig up and running.

Price	The Skinny
$125	5 PC slots. Software, 440BX – ready for P-II
$445	600MHz in a sub-$2K system
$168	128MB, squeezed in
$0	
$175	Went for 32 bits
$20	Still gotta have it
$120	IBM's low cost, fast drive
$105	Slot-drive DVD
$370	Solid 19" monitor at a budget price
$99	A3D and clean audio for under a C-note
$70	Went back to my favorites
$80	Solid performance, good price
$75	Back to the old familiar
$0	
$24	Cheap, nice add-on buttons
$30	Better than the "gaming" mouse
Total w/o Game Controllers	$1,926
$39	Cheap, decent 3D stick
$30	Solid basic gamepad
Total	$1,995

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TACTICAL TIPS FOR STAYING ALIVE AND BAGGING BAD GUYS | BY KEN BROWN

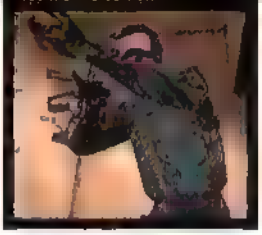
SWAT 3 Strategies

One would hope that the real officers in SWAT are a lot smarter than the ones in SWAT 3. Not only will your team members do stupid things that get them killed, but the levels are deviously designed to create all sorts of hideous tactical challenges.

And the bad guys, in medium-difficulty mode are fast and deadly sharpshooters.

To help improve your chances, we've compiled some tactics to get you through three of the most challenging levels in the game. A lot of these tips can also be applied to other levels

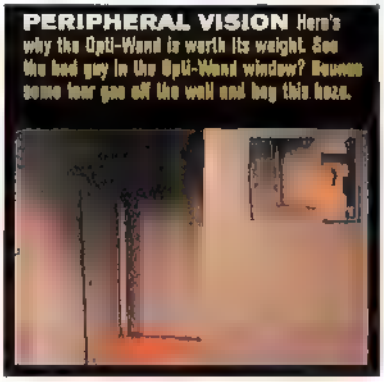
GUTSHOT Stay low going up stairs, and you'll have the advantage if a hostile rounds the corner.



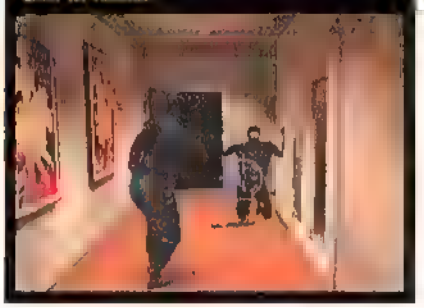
TANGO IN THE WINDOW Keep an eye on the window while your Elements are entering through the door. If you get a cooperative tango, cover him until a team can cuff him.

General Tips

- If you've gone dynamic, you can't order a team to Mirror for threats. But you've got an Opti-Wand to help you peek around corners. When in doubt, whip it out.
- Toss in tear gas whenever and wherever you please. Most suspects will surrender without a shot if they're blind and choking
- When entering unfamiliar territory, tell one team to cover it, then instruct the other team to move and clear. Keep leapfrogging in this manner so that one squad covers while the other moves.
- Bang and clear closed doors ad nauseum.
- Your teams won't cover doors if there is an unsecured suspect in their field of view. Cuff them, then order your team to cover for threats.
- You can get your team to throw lightsticks, tear gas, or flashbangs wherever you want. Tell them to deploy (F6), select the tactical aid, and point your target reticule where you want the object thrown. Bounce them off the stairwell to go upstairs
- Right clicking the mouse speeds up your movement.
- If all else fails, switch to easy-difficulty mode.



PERIPHERAL VISION Here's why the Opti-Wand is worth its weight. See the bad guy in the Opti-Wand window? Bounce some tear gas off the wall and beg this haze.

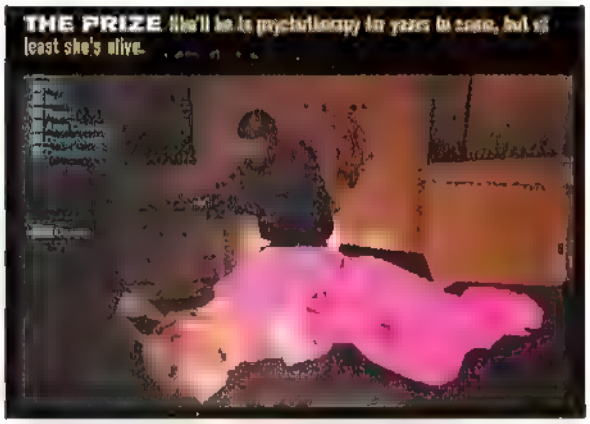


SITTING DUCK OR DECOY? Suspects have a tendency to cooperate in the worst places. This officer can be ambushed from three areas if he tries to cuff this guy, so be sure to cover for threats.

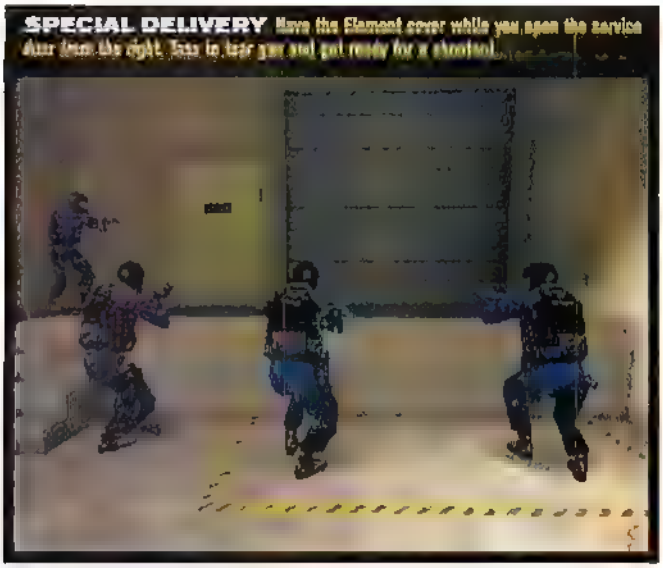
Home Invasion

As soon as this level starts, tell the Element to fall in and cover. Then check for threats and make a beeline for the right side ground-level entry. Be sure to cover the window first before entering

BALLS TO THE HALL Keep your Element in front of you in long hallways. You'll die slower that way.

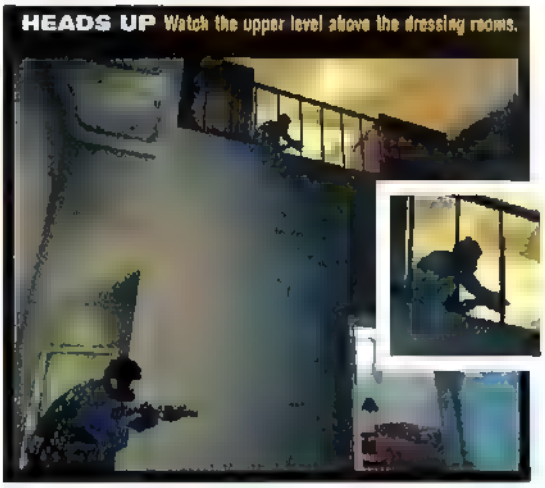


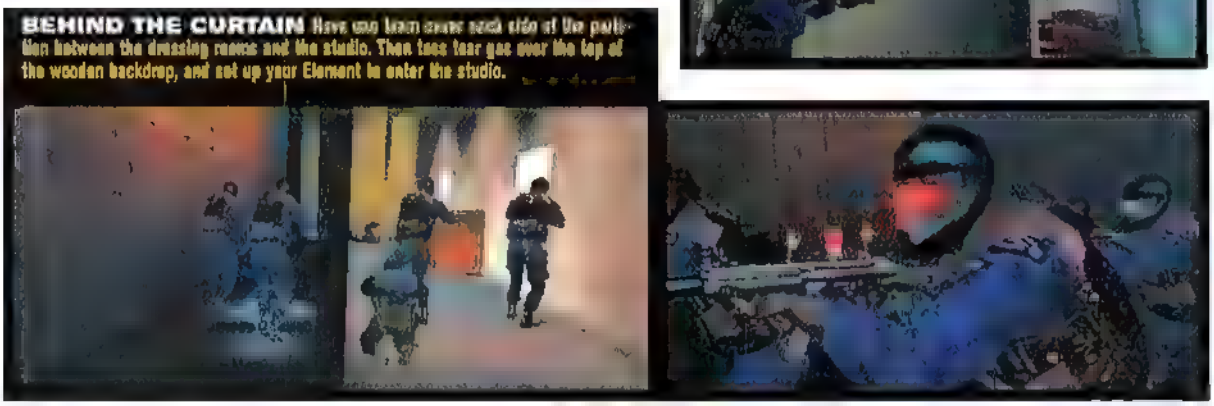
THE PRIZE She'll be in psychotherapy for years to come, but at least she's alive.


SPECIAL DELIVERY Have the Element cover while you open the service door from the right. Toss in tear gas and get ready for a shootout.

DBN Television Station

The TV station is a tough level. Try entering the station from the side; clear the dressing room area and second floor, then the studio, then the garage and Monkey Bar.

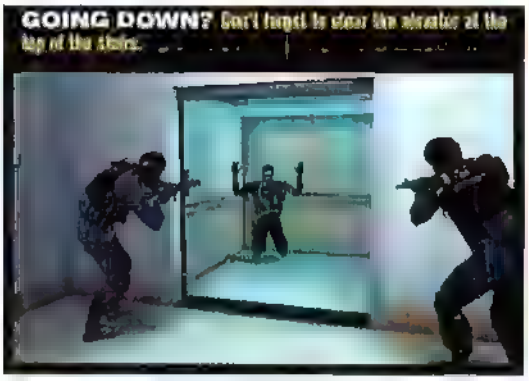

HEADS UP Watch the upper level above the dressing rooms.

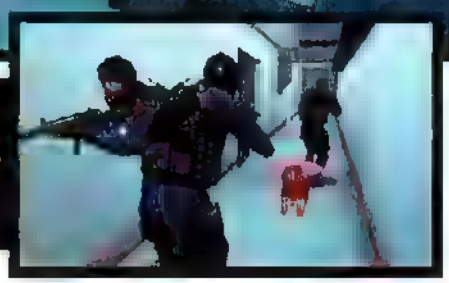

BEHIND THE CURTAIN Have one team cover each side of the partition between the dressing rooms and the studio. Then toss tear gas over the top of the wooden backdrop, and set up your Element to enter the studio.

The Hotel Carlyle

Enter the hotel from the basement. Mirror for suspects, toss in tear gas, and then tell one team to search right while the other team searches left. You cover the doors at left and the hallway. Once you've cleared the basement, head up the stairs and down the hall, and clear from the far end back, so you don't get caught in between.

COVER THIS DOOR The double doors in the hotel basement will give you fits. Close them and cover them at all times.


GOING DOWN? Don't forget to clear the elevator at the top of the stairs.


HALL OF DEATH Real SWAT officers will tell you that long hallways with several doors are extremely dangerous. Tell your teams to cover the doors as you move down the hallway. If a door is open, mirror for suspects and toss in tear gas if necessary. If not, go through the door at the end of the hallway, clear the balcony, and start working back. It's a big floor with a lot of rooms, but that's why you worked from the basement up – to reduce the chances of an ambush.

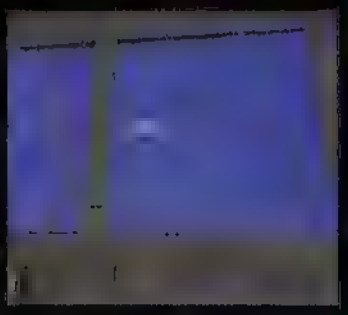
CGW TIPS

Cheats, Hacks, & Hints

System Shock 2

Tips There's a little amusing Easter Egg in SYSTEM SHOCK 2. On your third year of training in any division, do not go through the door into the skill selection area. Instead step, and turn left, to where the cargo workers usually are. You'll get to see a Service Robot disco-dancing after about 15 to 20 seconds; not very large, but definitely worth a good laugh.

–Robert Riter



Congratulations to our winner, who's as easily amused by dancing robots as we are. Straight from the BozoBin, Robert's getting a copy of BEATDOWN, a John Denver: The Wildlife Concert DVD, and a copy of DELUXE STAR TREK STARSHIP CREATOR. Enjoy!

Unreal Tournament

These cheats work only in the Single-Player Tournament or in Practice Sessions. Press [~] to bring down the console, then type:

Type	Effect
iamtheone	Activate cheat mode
God	God mode
Loaded	All weapons
Allammo	All ammo
Ghost	Walk through walls
Fly	Fly mode
Walk	Walk mode
playersonly	Freezes Time (type again to UnFreeze)
summon [item]	Summon item (see list below)

Items list: WarHeadLauncher, Enforcer, DoubleEnforcer, Minigun2, PulseGun, ShockRifle, SniperRifle, UT_BioRifle, UT_Eightball, UT_FlakCannon, Chainsaw

Heroes of Might & Magic III: Armageddon's Blade

While playing, press [Tab], then type in the following codes:

Code	Effect
Nwoquigon	Level up
Nwopaidme	Hero gains archangels
Nwodarthmaul	Hero gains black knights
Nwcconstant	Hero gains all buildings
Nwcr2d2	Hero gains all battle machines
Nwewatie	Hero gains money and resources
Nwcpedracer	Hero gains massive movement
Nwcprophecy	Show obelisk map
Nwcrevealourselves	Show terrain map
Nwcmidinhilarious	Hero gains 999 mana and all spells

CODES

BALDUR'S GATE

Open the file "Baldur.ini" in your BALDUR'S GATE directory and add the line "Cheats=1" under the "[Game Options]" entry. Then save the file and run the game.

Once in the game, hit [Ctrl]+[Tab] to bring up the console in which you type the cheats. [Ctrl]+[Tab] will also close this console. Type in the cheats exactly as they appear below and hit the [Enter] key to activate.

Code	Effect
Cheats:TheGreatGonzo()	Summons 10 killer chickens who defend you.
Cheats:FirstAid()	Creates 5 healing potions, 5 neutralize poison potions, and 1 stone to flesh scroll.
Cheats:Midas()	Gives you 500 gold.
Cheats:CowKill()	Creates a CowKill spell if you're near a cow.
Cheats:DrizztAttacks()	Creates a hostile Drizzt.
Cheats:DrizztDefends()	Creates a friendly Drizzt.
Cheats:CriticalItems()	Spawns all the game's critical items.
Cheats:Hans()	Moves your characters to a free adjacent area.
Cheats:ExploreArea()	Marks entire area explored.

HEAVY GEAR II

Press [~] to bring up the chat interface. Then type in the following:

Code	Effect
set cam0	God mode
set mission	Complete level

Got a great tip for your favorite game?

Send your tips, tricks, and strategies to cgw_letters@zd.com (please put CGTIPS in the subject line) and we'll publish one submission each month. If your tip is published, we'll send you something pulled at random from the Computer Gaming World BozoBin!

CODES

NEED FOR SPEED: HIGH STAKES

Type these codes anywhere in the Main Menu.

Code	Effect
Arcade Mode:	
TRAFFIC	Drive as traffic cars
ROCKET	Upgrade engine
MONKEY	Upgrade automatic transmission
MOON	Low gravity
MADLAND	Super-human opponents
Career Mode:	
BUY	Free purchase
CPU	No upgrades
CP1	First upgrade
CP2	2nd upgrade
CP3	3rd upgrade
CATFS	Cash increase
Hot Pursuit Mode:	
PCOP	Bonus hot pursuit car
FCOP	Bonus hot pursuit car
HCOP	Bonus hot pursuit car
Other Codes:	
ACAR	Bonus car
BCAR	Bonus car
CCAR	Bonus car
CARS	All cars
TRACKS	All tracks
ALLTIERS	Open all tiers
DUDMYWAY	Horn causes racers to crash
RESETYA	Horn causes racers to reset

STARCRAFT

Press [Enter], then type in these codes

Code	Effect
Show me the money	Minerals and gas increased by 10,000
Whats mine is mine	+500 Minerals
breathe deep	+500 Vespene
something for nothing	Everything upgraded
operation cwal	Faster building and instant upgrades
the gathering	Unlimited psionic ability
power overwhelming	Indestructible buildings and ships
war aint what it used to be	Remove fog of war
food for thought	Ignore supply limit when building units
black sheep wall	Full map
nagles	Opponent has no psionics
modify the phase variance	Build anything
medieval man	Free upgrades to units
there's no cow level	Skip mission
ophelia	Enable mission select
terra #	Jump to Terran mission #
zerg #	Jump to Zerg mission #
protoss #	Jump to Protoss mission #
staying alive	Continue after mission completed
man over game	Win game

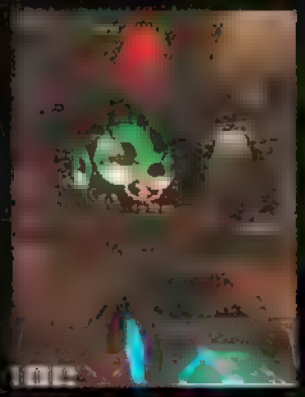
Quake III Arena

All of these codes require bringing down the console (by default, hit the [~] key)

Code	Effect
/amashooter	Unlocks all single-player tournament levels at skill one (I Can Win)
/iamamonkey	Unlocks all single-player tournament levels and adds 100 of every award to your record

To activate the following cheats, put the server in developer mode. Load up a map by pulling down the console and typing in "/devmap mapname"

Code	Effect
/god	God mode
/give all	Gives you everything



You can also use the following codes with the /give command:

Allammo	grappling hook	lightning gun	quad damage
Armor	grenade launcher	machinegun	railgun
battle suit		medkit	regeneration
bfg10k	haste	personal teleporter	rocket launcher
flight	health		shotgun
gauntlet	invisibility	plasma gun	

Note: A while back, we told you about how to make this macro that allows for precise zooming. There was a slip in the editing process, and the command to execute the .cfg file is "/exec", not just "exec".

Age of Wonders

TIP: Heroes are great, but they're tough to come by...even if you get the Call Hero spell, most of the time the summoned heroes don't want to work for you anyway (losers). The solution? Dominate/Charm/Seduce them into your army instead, using Nymphs, Satyrs, Charlatans, or what have you. Since heroes tend to have high resistance, you'll benefit from Entangling or Cold Striking (freezing) the hero to give yourself more Charm chances. *—Jason Kapalka*

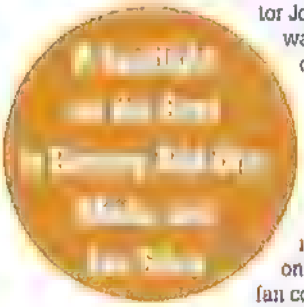
INSIDE

HOMEBREW GAMING

by T. Byrl Baker

Welcome to Homebrew Gaming

I have a lifelong relationship with *Computer Gaming World*. At the age of 13, I submitted an article on how to break the sound barrier in a P-51 in CHUCK YEAGER'S ADVANCED FLIGHT TRAINER. This resulted in my first rejection slip. Undaunted, I sent an article describing how to take the F-18 to the edge of space in the same game, thereby securing my second pink slip. Thanks to then-editor Johnny Wilson's good judgment, I was forced out of an early writing career and was able to focus my full attention on passing junior-high English. Now that my age has doubled (and I have acquired the ability to diagram a sentence), *CGW* has given me my big break. In this new column, I'll be covering the biggest events, best add-ons, and brightest designers in the fan communities. I can think of no better way to kick off the column than to discuss The Gamers Net, a mod paradise with enough projects in development to fill this entire magazine with tales of wonder.



Grognard Heaven

I first discovered TGN at **www.thegamers.net**, after I'd heard about a mod for SSI's STEEL PANTHERS 2 that used an enhanced version of that game's engine to turn it into a World War II game called—surprisingly enough—STEEL PANTHERS 2: WORLD WAR II. Stunned by how much more realistic this mod was than anything in the original STEEL PANTHERS series, I've since gone to the site regularly for upgrades and scenarios.

Gamers who enjoyed SP2:WW2 will be pleased to know that at least two new free STEEL PANTHERS "mods" are slated for release. Actually, calling these products mods doesn't do them justice. They are complete standalone games with all-new graphics, sounds, units, AI, maps, and combat routines.

The first of these games, STEEL PANTHERS: WORLD AT WAR, again puts the focus on World War II by modeling units and battles from 1930 to 1949. New features include a combat model with greater fidelity, off-board artillery, and reinforcement hexes. Additionally, units can capture artillery and vehicles, and crews that have abandoned vehicles can rally and reman their mounts. This Windows-only conversion will offer Internet play and should be available by the time you read this.

The other game, STEEL PANTHERS: THE NAM, covers combat in Vietnam from 1950-1975. The engine will really be stretched for this one, with the introduction of tunnels for the VC, weapons like booby traps, and other enhancements that attempt to capture the flavor of that conflict. Viet Cong casualties are never fully known to American forces until a battle is over; they won't know how effective they were until that point. You can learn more at the Steel Lightning site, found at **slightning.thegamers.net**.

But Wait, There's More...

If you're not a fan of STEEL PANTHERS in any incarnation, take heart. David Heath, TGN's Director of Operations, somehow convinced SSI to give TGN the source code for other games, like WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET III: AGE OF RIFLES, GARY GRIGSBY'S PACIFIC WAR, and GARY GRIGSBY'S WAR IN RUSSIA. The staff at TGN is updating the graphics, sound, and game engines of all these titles and will release the results, as usual, for free. The older games are being ported to Windows, with added email and Internet play, and the PACIFIC WAR update should be available by April or May of this year.

TGN staffers obviously have enough talent to make their own games, and they have plans to do so, but it makes sense that they are using old code right now. Not having to modify large portions of the original game that actually worked means the updated games can be cranked out faster than those made from scratch. It also allows for greater ease of development for entirely new games based on the old engines. "The long-term goal," says Heath, "is to take the strategic engine in PACIFIC WAR, cannibalize it, and make an East Front/West Front game."

To top things off, all of the games available at TGN (along with new games from other manufacturers) are supplied with a steady stream of free campaigns and scenarios. Most of these come from "Wild" Bill Wilder and his team at the Wild Bill & the Raiders Design Headquarters (you can find them at **wbr.thegamers.net**). That team's superb effort, along with the mods and games provided by other TGN affiliates, should keep wargamers in the trenches for a long time. "I guess basically what we're doing is becoming a body shop for games," says Heath, in what may be the biggest understatement I've ever heard.

If your mod squad is working on something the rest of the world needs to know about, send the details to me at fanbase@mail.com.

DEDICATED TO THE CAUSE Dedicated game fans – like the folks at Steel Lightning (slightning.thegamers.net) – are taking existing game engines and modifying them to create new scenarios and, in the case of STEEL PANTHERS: WORLD AT WAR, practically whole new games.

INSIDE

ACTION

by Thierry "Scooter" Nguyen

Thierry_Nguyen@zd.com

Scooter Says Shut Up

If you missed it the first time, let me spell it out for you: I like UNREAL TOURNAMENT more than QUAKE III ARENA. It's not that hard to figure out. I reviewed both games; I gave one a higher score than the other. Originally, I had planned on doing a feature-by-feature comparison, followed by an overall winner. Either that, or just explaining at length why I prefer fragging Xan rather than Xaero. I don't need to do that, though. Numerically, you can already see where I stand, and at this point I'd just be adding fuel to the fire that is the UT vs. Q3A "war."

UT vs Q3: Enough Already!

These wars of words on Usenet and web message boards perversely interest me more than the games themselves. What starts as genuinely interesting discussion often degenerates into pointless bickering by, oh, the third post. The fact is, these wars between fans of two games are like fanatical religious debates: Both sides are way too stubborn and committed for a real discussion, so all we get is a lot of huffing and puffing. No one bothers to try leaving it at "it's just not my scene"; they almost always have to get the last word in. Any intelligent commentary is usually answered with idiotic flames.

Case in point: Someone recently posted a Penny Arcade comic strip as a good summary of the current UT vs. Q3A "debate." What happens next? Some people start posting and bickering about which side has more losers and which side started the war in the first place. Way to reinforce the point, guys.

So I like UT more than Q3A, and someone else likes Q3A more than UT. Big deal. I don't feel compelled to write lengthy manifestos detailing why my preference is right and others' aren't. People have their own tastes; that's that. Now, if someone were to claim that, say, TRESPASSER or EXTREME PAINTBRAWL is the superior game, well, I'd try to convince him otherwise but I won't martyr myself to do it. There's a line between healthy debate and annoying argument, and right now, the UT vs. Q3A war has long gone past it. Talking about things such as gaming evolution versus revolution, or how healthy it is to have competition within the games biz is good; writing obscenity-drenched insults involving UT/Q3A gamers, their mothers, and/or livestock is just pathetic.

Think about it: The time you take to write up that lengthy post, which will ultimately go to someone as stubborn as you, and result in an even lengthier reply, to which you must answer in kind...that time is lost to you. You could have used that time to, I dunno, read a book, go outside, or even just play the game. Don't waste your time arguing with diehards.

So people like game reviewer Tom Chick and I prefer UT, while QUAKE-god Dennis "Thresh" Fong and *PC Accelerator*'s Rob Smith prefer Q3A. Don't start using our opinions in an attempt to legitimize your latest manifesto. Everyone has different opinions and biases. Next time, click "next message" when you spot a thread bordering on another pointless debate, and let people play what they want while you play what you want.

Penny Arcade Cartoons, © copyright 1998, 1999 Mike Krahulik and Jerry Holkins

Scooter's Mix

1. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
2. Toy Story
3. The Master and Margarita by Mikhail Bulgarov
4. BATTLEZONE II
5. GABRIEL KNIGHT III: BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED

In the Zone

I've got my hands on a late-late-but-will-go-gold-tomorrow version of BATTLEZONE II. Although, I've just started playing it, I can give you my first impressions. The graphics look even better this time; there are more environment types, and skimming on top of water that is reflecting mountains and bridges is a nice way to justify how much money you spent on your computer. It's also more accessible to people who have a hard time handling both command and combat at once. In one hand, you can opt to be just a pilot and hop around leading your squad, leaving the building management to the computer. Conversely, you can hop out of your vehicle, and go to a Command Station which gives you an overhead view, and play it almost like a strategy game. Hopefully this will still more than 11,000 cuties – the terrifying main figure of the first game.

Counter Striking

It's awards time this issue, but I wanted to make a special mention here. My personal pick for Mod Of The Year: COUNTER-STRIKE. Think of it as the RAINBOW SIX mod for HALF-LIFE. It's by far the best teamplay-based mod out there, with realistic weapon modeling, interesting maps, and even a radio-communication system. Go snag it over at www.counter-strike.net.

INSIDE

STRATEGY

by Robert Coffey

robert_coffey@zd.com

A No-Win Situation

Multiple [illegible] remote areas of the map, it'll [illegible] that lets you gossip trenches in the earth. Once opponents sides with [illegible] units—it would seem that [illegible] [illegible] by picking up German developer Topware's EARTH 2150 for worldwide distribution outside of Germany. Not as cool as all that [illegible] [illegible] sounds, a basic flaw in the game's premise has us concerned that this game might end up infuriating gamers more than wowing them. EARTH 2150 charges you with gathering enough resources by guard's end to fleet a reality decaying planet. Since those are the same resources you use to create units, it's possible you could bent on the mineheap, reach the end of the game, and still lose by having earned too many resources to build the forces that ostensibly helped you win.

What's that all about?

In a game in which constructing enough [illegible] to let you protect your vital base buildings by actually mounting defenses on them, why aren't you protected from the potentially fatal brain-squeezing game saps caused by the digital equivalent of the endless Lucy/Charlie Brown football-snatching morality play? How's leaving part of the spit-and-polish Windows 95 [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]

THE QUEST FOR VICTORY WILL TAKE YOU JUST ABOUT EVERYWHERE.

3-TIERED GAME PLAY, 3 TIMES THE STRATEGY, AND COMBOTS OVER 3 STORIES HIGH

Metal Fatigue lets you build and command behemoth combots. Armed with parts like Sonar Legs, Jet Pack Torsos and Gatling Gun Arms, you can fight for upgrades or simply sever your enemies limbs and attach them to your own forces. Best of all, you control units across 3 levels simultaneously in what has been described as part real-time strategy, part 3D action, and all together revolutionary.

METAL FATIGUE

PSYGNOSIS

PC CD ROM

RP

www.metalfatigue.com

INSIDE

SIMULATIONS & SPACE

by Gordon Berg

Surfing for Sim Stuff

At the start of each month, senior editor Jeff Green asks the columnists what topic we plan to write about next. He says he needs to know this information so that he might be bet ter informed and prepared for the editorial meetings he must attend Each month, my response is usually the same: "Jeff, I have absolutely no idea." Personally, I think he asks so that he can steal any potentially good ideas For example, I came up with a compelling argument as to why Pokemon should be mentioned in a simulation column and he said our readers weren't interested in Pokémon Just thought you should know

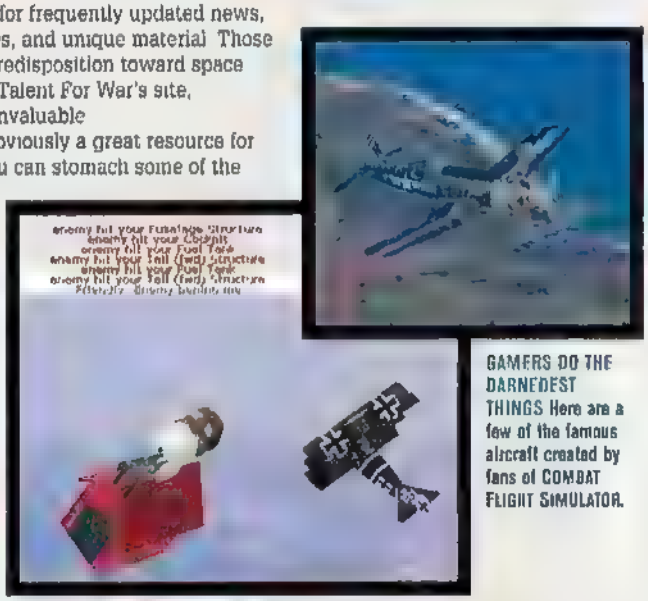
I thought about resuming my Chicken Little routine of how flight sims are dying, but this column is better served when I play the role of cheerleader. It's not easy, though One need look no further than giant-robot sim sales or FREESPACE 2 to see that any game using a joystick will probably suffer a horrible death at the retail level. (Maybe Chris Roberts is on to something by making FREELANCER extremely mouse-friendly.)

On the Web at Least, Sims Are Alive and Kicking

So, when in doubt as to what to write about, always fall back on traditional column-filler material. Gordon's favorite web site haunts.

Let's start with some daily news sites. Any savvy online-sim veteran makes **www.simhq.com** or **www.combatsim.com** part of their *de rigueur* surfing habit, but a few new sites are also worthy of some daily inspection. Make sure to swing by **www.dogfighter.com** **www.frugalsworld.com**, and **www.sim-arena.com** for frequently updated news, quality stories, and unique material Those of you with a predisposition toward space combat will find A Talent For War's site, **atfw.intelligamer.com**, equally invaluable

The Usenet newsgroups are obviously a great resource for your sim addiction, assuming you can stomach some of the more "eccentric" types that often lurk there (then again, that's what a "kill filter" is for, isn't it?) Plus, many web and fan-sites now host powerful threaded-message boards, allowing them to deliver far more relevant discussion on whatever topic you're searching for. The best web alternative to Usenet that I've found is Delphi's flight sim forum at **www.delphi.com/flight/start**. You'll have to sign up, but membership is free



GAMERS DO THE DARNEDEST THINGS Here are a few of the famous aircraft created by fans of COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR.

Sites more dedicated in their focus cover only one title. Such sites not only offer equally useful message boards but they can also hook you up with some cool add-ons as well. For example, the favorite hangout for fans of Activision's FIGHTER SQUADRON SCREAMIN' DEMONS OVER EUROPE can be found at **www.fightersquadron.com** It was there that I discovered some WWI add-on links and downloaded a SE5a from **www.schoolmusic.com/chickencoop/se5a/index.htm** A few minutes with the mission editor allowed me to couple this with the Fokker Dr1 from **www.openplane.org** and I was in WWI heaven. Those of you without FS.SDOE can still get an idea of how much fun I m having. Download the demo from **www.openplane.org** and you'll fly a rousing four vs four Fokker dogfight. By the way, you can also find a link to the latest "plane pack" effort at the **fightersquadron.com** page, a perfect example of what I was talking about in my November "Labor of Love" column

Those of you still fond of Microsoft's COMBAT FLIGHT SIMULATOR will find yourself in plane-download heaven at **www.combatfs.com**, while visitors to **simcombat.com** will be equally rewarded with add-ons to several other simulations, especially RED BARON 2/3D. JANE'S WORLD WAR II FIGHTER fans need to swing by **members.xoom.com/ww2f** for a dynamic campaign generator EUROPEAN AIR WAR fans not quite happy with the flight models should check out ECAOnline at **www.geocities.com/weurger/main.htm**. Finally, if you gave up on MI TANK PLATOON II, you should look at it again now that it's been patched It's cheap if you can find it, and there's a really cool fan site at **members.xoom.com/m1tp2**

When not engaged in aerial maneuvers, Gordon Berg works as a network administrator for a non-profit social services organization.

Gordon's Mix

1. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
2. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
3. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
4. UNREAL TOURNAMENT
5. UNREAL TOURNAMENT

A Farewell to FALCON

Call it coincidence, but shortly after my sarcastic open letter to Hasbro appeared in the January issue of CGW, Microprose as we knew it effectively became no more. Gee, I had no idea I had that much influence (either that or Hasbro's stockholders were lashing out in a jealous reaction to the appearance of Mattel's Barbie in *Toy Story 2*) Still, their getting rid of the premier simulation franchise was fairly disheartening. I was told the sim sold around 500,000 units worldwide, but a PR rep was quoted over at **Gamecenter.com** as saying, "We think flight sims are great games...we just wish they had a broader audience." How much broader than 500,000 are they shooting for?"

Right before the bad news hit the Alameda offices, the final patch (ver 1.08) was released. This version still has some problems, but don't despair. Enter the heroes at **www.ibeta.com**, the group responsible for the final patch's testing. Visit their site to download their own patch for version 1.08 and an extensive FAQ that details some workarounds and improvements.

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INSIDE

SPORTS

by George Jones

Fame, Shame, and Innovation

George_Jones@zd.com

George Hands Out Sports Awards to the Naughty and Nice

Computer sports game fans, today is your lucky day. For no additional charge, with your paid purchase of *Computer Gaming World*, this month—and this month only!—you receive free admission to the first ever *CGW* sports game Hall Of Fame, Shame, And Innovation induction ceremony!

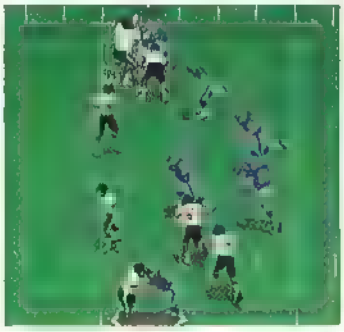
(This ceremony is neither sponsored nor endorsed by the *CGW* editorial staff. Which is fine by me, because then they can't contribute to it.)

Let's not waste any time, shall we? Each nominee has been inducted on the basis of fame, shame, or innovation in the area of sports gaming.

One-on-One: Dr. J vs. Larry Bird: In an era when there was no EA Sports (or ESPN, for that matter), Electronic Arts foreshadowed their upcoming success with this 8-bit schoolyard hit. Featuring a three-point line, fatigue, a 24-second clock, and shattering backboards, ONE-ON-ONE kept us glued to our Commodore 64s and Apple IIs, way back in the day.

Superstar Ice Hockey: If you thought the FRONT PAGE SPORTS: FOOTBALL franchise was the first to bring career play into the PC-sports arena, think again. This 1987 gem of a hockey game from Mindscape allowed you to guide your hockey team season after season, in the hopes of making the international playoffs year after year. In between seasons, you could trade for new players, or train your team in certain performance categories to make them faster skaters or better shooters. On top of it all, SUPERSTAR ICE HOCKEY was an enjoyable, fast-moving hockey game.

Gamestar Championship Football: GFL attempted what many of us have thought would be cool at some point in our lives: a first-person-perspective football game that allowed you to control the receiver (by running pass-routes) or the running backs. Unfortunately for Gamestar—a company that also created a fantastic full-court, two-on-two basketball game with season play—DOOM and football don't mix. Still, they gain entry on the merits of their innovative attempt. The HOFSI applauds their effort.



SIERRA'S FRONT PAGE SPORT FOOTBALL Sierra/Dynamix ruled the computer football field through most of the 1990s.

Front Page Sports Football: For being the first game to combine great graphics, strategic depth, real-life players, and career play. Yes, Sierra ruled the pigskin roost with this title...until a tragic bug overdose in 1999 ruined its life forever (cue VH-1's *Behind the Music* music).

High Heat 2000: In addition to its stellar gameplay, HIGH HEAT 2000 also gains entry for somehow getting mentioned in every single one of *CGW*'s last seven—make that eight—issues.

Hardball: This baseball legend gains entry both for its amazing gameplay in the early years...and for its absolutely shameful, unimaginative, dull gameplay in its later years.

John Madden Football: For quelling our post-TECMO BOWL-blues and bringing us the joy of action-oriented football for almost 10 years running.

Mario Golf: Hey, don't laugh. Many a sports-game designer could learn a lesson from the boys at Nintendo. They've taken a simple, enjoyable golf game and, by adding role-playing elements (as you play and accomplish certain tasks, you gain experience points, which improve your performance) have created one of the more compelling sports games of the last few years.

Was your favorite game left out? Email the HOFSI at gjones@zd.com. *The $200 qualifying fee will guarantee your favorite game entry through the pearly gates. (Checks not accepted.)*

ELECTRONIC ARTS' ONE-ON-ONE Even on the ol' Apple II, EA could pull some great moves.

George's Mix

1. Things Fall Apart by The Roots
2. MARIO GOLF for the Game Boy Color
3. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
4. NBA LIVE 2000
5. Naked by David Sedaris

Hall of Fame Is People!

The HOFSI would also like to acknowledge the life-long efforts of two real-life sports game designers. Andrew Dolphin, for building one of the most in-depth and enjoyable libraries of DOS-based sports games ever: COACH and COLLEGE COACH football, as well as the generically titled BASKETBALL, HOCKEY, and BASEBALL MANAGER – all of which featured full career modes, with retiring players, rookie drafts...and the ability to play through a full season in 15 minutes.

And along similar lines, we recognize Mr. Lance Haffner and his line of text-based sports simulations. For keeping it real for all those years when there was no such thing as a graphical sports game that allowed you to use your brain.

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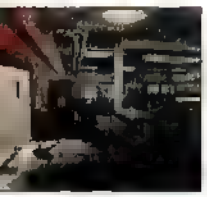

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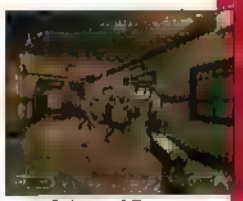

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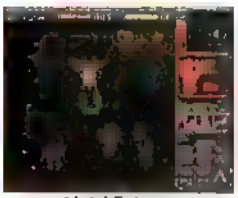

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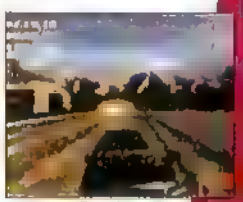

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Interplay (Action)
Release: 2/00
PC CD
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[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
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Myst Masterpiece Edition	09/99	$28.99
[illegible]	10/99	$33.99
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Links LS 99	11/98	$29.99
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Interplay (Simulation)
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[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
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[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
Thousand Arms	10/99	$48.99
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[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]
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[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

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GREENSPEAK by Jeff Green

An Open Letter to Lord British

Your Highness: ULTIMA IX is a Royal Pain in the Ass

Dear Lord British,

Greetings, Sire. How fareth you, at the start of this glorious new millennium? I hope well. Forgiveth me for disturbing thee in public like this, but I have a message of the gravest importance. First, though, I beg your indulgence in allowing me to speak in my common, vulgar tongue, for I am afraid, alas, that whenever I hear this pretentious pseudo-Elizabethan talk, it always makes me want to kicketh somebody's asseth.

Lord British, you and I have never met, but I feel as though I've known you for years. Way before I ever became a scribe for this humble magazine, I was a huge fan of Your Majesty's games. Your ULTIMA role-playing games are true classics that kept me up way too many nights when I should have been sleeping, studying, or learning how to talk to girls.

As both *CGW*'s RPG editor and as a fan, I was looking forward to your latest epic, ULTIMA IX: ASCENSION, just as much as anyone. Five years in the making! The glorious finale to the trilogy of trilogies! The grand summation of 20 years worth of ULTIMAs! Like *Star Wars Episode One*, ULTIMA IX had legions of loyal fans waiting in anticipation for years, ready to plunk down their money the day it was released.

Which is why I am so pissed off.

Lord British, you have made a mistake. A big one. ULTIMA IX, you see, was not a finished product when you put it on store shelves and started raking in $50 apiece for it. Not even close. Riddled with bugs, bogged down by horrible performance, marred by brain-dead AI, unplayable on most PCs, ULTIMA IX—rather than being the gaming event of 1999—has turned into the fiasco of 1999. The reviews are almost universally scathing; many fans are furious with you; and instead of reaping any awards, ULTIMA IX is damn lucky to escape without taking home our dubious Coaster of the Year award—an award we handed out two years ago, you may recall, to your equally buggy and unfinished ULTIMA ONLINE.

For the life of me, Sire, I can't begin to understand how you could have possibly let this happen again. Do you not play your own games anymore? Do you not care about the quality or reputation of your products? Is the desire to make money for Christmas really so much more important, at this stage of your career, than doing the right thing and delaying your products until they're done?

Don't tell me you were caught unaware. I don't believe it. The first patch has a readme file dated *before* the game appeared on shelves, meaning the team was scrambling to fix bugs *before* anyone had bought the game. But, hey, you don't need to be a detective to know how unfinished ULTIMA IX was. All you have to do is boot it up—if you can. One *CGW* editor tried installing on three different state-of-the-art PCs before giving up in disgust. Me, I installed it just fine. The problems began when I tried to play it, and faced one embarrassing glitch after another. Like monsters who stand still. Like a frame-rate so slow, it looks like a slide show. Like heavy rain falling inside your castle. *Inside your own castle*, Lord British!

The great, sad irony of all of this is that for years the ULTIMA games have preached the gospel of ethics, and morality, and doing the right thing. Remember? According to the great Lord British, the eight virtues worth pursuing are Honesty, Compassion, Valor, Justice, Sacrifice, Honor, Spirituality, and Humility. I'm curious, Sire. Which virtues are tested when it comes to deciding whether to ship a product you know isn't ready yet? Honesty, maybe? Sacrifice? And which choice do you think the Avatar would make?

I know this is harsh, Sire. But I have been waiting to hear something, anything from you for about a month now, and, as of this writing, you have been strangely silent. It seems particularly strange, since you were so willing to take credit for the game *before* it shipped, what with your name at the top of the credits and all. And inside my ULTIMA IX box, there's even a certificate signed by you, which, you say, serves "as a reminder of just how much you've meant to myself, ULTIMA, and Origin."

Which virtues are tested when it comes to deciding whether to ship a product you know isn't ready yet? Honesty, maybe? Sacrifice? And which choice do you think the Avatar would make?

You say we mean a lot to you? Then try showing it. Talk to your fans. Go to your web site and tell us what happened. The sun is fading fast on the kingdom of Britannia, Sire. Are you going to let it go down in shame, in these twilight hours, or with glory and honor?

I await your reply in anticipation, and until then remain

Thy Humble Servant
Jeff Green

What Jeff doesn't realize is that the Guardian is alive and well and knows where he lives. Cast spells of protection his way at jeff_green@zd.com

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- 3-Year Limited Warranty[2]

NEW DELL® *INSPIRON*™ 5000 Notebook

Performance and Mobility
- Intel® Pentium® III Processor at 500MHz
- 15" SXGA+ Active Matrix Display
- 64MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 6.0GB[5] Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- Modular 24X Max Variable CD-ROM
- 2X AGP 8MB ATI RAGE Mobility™-P 3D Video
- Internal PCI 56K Capable[11] V.90 Fax Modem
- *NEW* Microsoft® Works Suite 2000 with Money 2000 Standard

$2799 As low as $76/Mo., for 48 Mos.[17]
E-VALUE CODE: 89620-800227h

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- HASBRO® Interactive GamePack[21], add $79
- Intel® PC Camera Pack[22], add $79

NEW DELL® *INSPIRON*™ 5000 Notebook

Performance and Mobility
- Intel® Celeron™ Processor at 466MHz
- 14.1" XGA Active Matrix Display
- 64MB SDRAM
- 6.0GB[5] Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- Modular 24X Max Variable CD-ROM
- Internal PCI 56K Capable[11] V.90 Fax Modem
- *NEW* Microsoft® Office 2000 Small Business plus Encarta 2000

$2199 As low as $63/Mo., for 48 Mos.[17]
E-VALUE CODE: 89620-800221h

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- Quicken® 2000 PowerPack[23], add $89
- Home Reference 4-Pack[24], add $79

DELL® *INSPIRON*™ 7500 Notebook

Mobile Desktop
- *NEW* Intel® Pentium® III Processor at 650MHz with Intel® SpeedStep™ Technology[4]
- 15.4" SXGA TFT Active Matrix Display
- 96MB 100MHz SDRAM
- 6.0GB[5] Ultra ATA Hard Drive (75GB Max[10])
- Removable Combo 32X Max Variable CD-ROM and Floppy Drive
- 2X AGP 8MB ATI RAGE Mobility™-P 3D Video
- Internal PCI 56K Capable[11] V.90 Fax Modem
- *NEW* Microsoft® Works Suite 2000 with Money 2000 Standard

$3599 As low as $88/Mo., for 48 Mos.[17]
E-VALUE CODE: 89620-800235

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- Inspiron™ 7500 Advanced Port Replicator (Includes 10/100 NIC Card), add $259
- *NEW* Accessories Bundle (harman/kardon Speakers, Intel® PC Camera Pack[22], Headphones, Microphone), add $99

DELL® *INSPIRON*™ 3700 Notebook

Design and Affordability
- Intel® Celeron™ Processor at 433MHz
- *NEW* 12.1" SVGA Active Matrix Display
- 32MB SDRAM
- 4.8GB[5] Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- Modular 24X Max Variable CD-ROM
- 2X AGP 8MB ATI RAGE Mobility™-M1 3D Video
- *NEW* Microsoft® Works Suite 2000 with Money 2000 Standard

$1699 As low as $46/Mo., for 48 Mos.[17]
E-VALUE CODE: 89620-800216

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- Traveler's Bundle (Nylon Carrying Case, Targus Defcon Notebook Alarm, APC Notebook Surge Protector), add $99
- Second 53WHr Lithium Ion Battery with ExpressCharge™ Technology, add $99

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Prices, specifications and availability may change without notice. U.S. only. [2]For a copy of Guarantees or Limited Warranties, write Dell USA L.P., Attn: Warranties, One Dell Way, Round Rock, TX 78682. [3]At-home or on-site service provided via contract between customer and third-party; availability varies. Technician dispatched, if necessary, following phone-based troubleshooting. Other conditions apply. [5]For hard drives, GB means 1 billion bytes; accessible capacity varies with operating environment. [10]Download speeds limited to 53Kbps. Upload speeds are less (in about the 30Kbps range) and by modem manufacturer and online conditions. Analog phone line and compatible server required. [11]Includes 150 hours Internet access per month, with $1.50 per hour charge for each hour (or fraction thereof) over 150 hours. Remote subscribers subject to additional charge of $4.95 for each hour of Dellnet service. Excludes applicable taxes and local/long distance telephone access fees or charges.

Dimension® Desktop Systems include:
- Keyboard ■ Mouse ■ 3.5" Floppy Drive
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- Microsoft® Windows® 98, Second Edition
- Norton AntiVirus™ 2000 (CD)
- 3-Year Limited Warranty[1] ■ 1-Year At-home Service[2]

NEW DELL® *DIMENSION*® XPS T650r Desktop

High Performance, Great Value
- Intel® Pentium® III Processor at 650MHz
- 128MB SDRAM at 100MHz ■ 20.4GB® Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- 17" (16.0" vis, .26dp) M780 Monitor
- 32MB NVIDIA TNT2 "Ultra" AGP Graphics ■ 48X Max Variable CD-ROM Drive
- Turtle Beach Montego® II A3D™ 320V Sound Card with MusicMatch® Jukebox Standard™
- Altec Lansing ACS-340 Speakers with Subwoofer
- V.90 56K Capable™ PCI Telephony Modem for Windows
- 1-Year Dellnet™ Internet Access[3] with 20MB of Online Backup[4]

$1999 As low as $65/Mo., for 48 Mos.[5]
E-VALUE CODE: **89620-500219x**

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- *NEW* SB Live! Value Digital with MusicMatch® Jukebox Enhanced™, add $59
- *NEW* Altec Lansing THX Certified ADA885 Dolby Digital Speakers with Subwoofer, add $188

NEW DELL® *DIMENSION*® XPS B733r Desktop

Cutting Edge Technology
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- 128MB RDRAM ■ 27.3GB® Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- 17" (16.0" vis, .26dp) M780 Monitor
- *NEW* 32MB NVIDIA geFORCE 4X AGP Graphics Card
- 8X Max Variable DVD-ROM Drive with *FREE* DVD Movie Offer[6]
- SB Live! Value Digital with MusicMatch® Jukebox Enhanced™
- Harman Kardon HK-595 Surround Sound Speakers with Subwoofer
- V.90 56K Capable™ PCI Telephony Modem for Windows
- 1-Year Dellnet™ Internet Access[3] with 20MB of Online Backup[4]

$2799 As low as $76/Mo., for 48 Mos.[5]
E-VALUE CODE: **89620-500227h**

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- 19" (17.9" vis, .24 - .25AG) P991 FD Trinitron® Monitor, add $207
- 8X Max Variable DVD-ROM Drive and Decoder Card with TV Out with *FREE* DVD Movie Offer[6], add $59

DELL® *DIMENSION*® XPS T550 Desktop

High Performance, Great Value
- Intel® Pentium® III Processor at 550MHz
- 128MB SDRAM at 100MHz ■ 10GB® Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- *NEW* 17" (16.0" vis, .26dp) E770 Monitor
- *NEW* 16MB ATI RAGE 128 Pro
- 48X Max Variable CD-ROM Drive
- Turtle Beach Montego® II A3D™ 320V Sound Card with MusicMatch® Jukebox Standard™
- Altec Lansing ACS-340 Speakers with Subwoofer
- V.90 56K Capable™ PCI Telephony Modem for Windows

$1499 As low as $41/Mo., for 48 Mos.[5]
E-VALUE CODE: **89620-500214**

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- Microsoft® Natural Keyboard Pro, Dell® Edition, add $59
- 1-Year Dellnet™ Internet Access[3] with 20MB of Online Backup[4], add $100

DELL® *DIMENSION*® L433cx Desktop

Affordable Desktop Solution
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- 64MB SDRAM at 100MHz ■ 4.3GB® Ultra ATA Hard Drive
- *NEW* 15" (13.8" vis) E550 Monitor ■ Intel® 3D AGP Graphics
- 40X Max Variable CD-ROM Drive
- SoundBlaster 64V PCI Sound Card with MusicMatch® Jukebox Standard™
- harman/kardon Speakers
- V.90 56K Capable™ PCI DataFax Modem for Windows

$899 As low as $25/Mo., for 48 Mos.[5]
E-VALUE CODE: **89620-500208**

Dell Recommended Upgrades:
- 10GB® Ultra ATA Hard Drive, add $68
- *NEW* 17" (16.0" viewable, .28dp) E770 Monitor, add $68

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SERVICE AND SUPPORT: Dell offers you the help you need when you need it, via phone or online. ■ 24x7 phone and online tech support ■ Dimension Premier 3-Year At-Home Service[2], add $99 ■ Inspiron 3-Year On-Site Service[2], add $99 ■ Support.dell.com for innovative online support tools

INTERNET ACCESS AND SERVICES: Dell offers you access to the Internet as well as online services and resources designed to help you make the most of your PC ■ Dellnet™ Internet access[3] with 20MB of Online Backup[4] ■ Simple drag and drop website creation tool with 12MB of homepage storage space ■ Over $350 worth of special offers for Dell customers with popular online retailers

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- 19" (18.0" vis. .26dp) M990 Monitor ■ *NEW* 32MB NVIDIA geFORCE 4X AGP Graphics Card
- 8X Max Variable DVD-ROM Drive* and Decoder Card with TV Out with *FREE* DVD Movie Offer*
- SB Live! Value Digital with MusicMatch® Jukebox Enhanced™
- *NEW* Altec Lansing THX Certified ADA885 Dolby Digital Speakers with Subwoofer
- V.90 56K Capable* PCI Telephony Modem for Windows
- *NEW* Microsoft® Works Suite 2000 with Money 2000 Basic
- Microsoft® Windows® 98, Second Edition ■ QuietKey® Keyboard ■ Logitech MouseMan® Wheel
- 3-Year Limited Warranty* ■ 1-Year At-home Service*

$2999 As low as $82/Mo. for 48 Mos.[2]
E-VALUE CODE: 89618-5002296

Dell Recommended Upgrades:

- 1-Year DellnetSM Internet Access* with 20MB of Online Backup*, add $100
- 34.2GB* Ultra ATA Hard Drive, add $170
- Microsoft® Natural Keyboard Pro, Dell® Edition, add $59

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